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

# AMBASSADOR FRANCES COOK

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**INTERVIEW**

*Q: Why don't we just start right at the beginning with your birth and where you were born and where you grew up?*

COOK: I was born in West Virginia in Charleston. My family moved to Florida when I was, I guess, in the beginning of my fourth grade year, so I grew up in Florida, but of West Virginia stock.

*Q: That was in Charleston, West Virginia in 19...?*

COOK: '45.

*Q: You were there until the fourth grade so that's quite a good start. You must have gotten a good flavor of West Virginia?*

COOK: Oh I did and we always went back for vacations when we were living in Florida. It's still a very special place to me. I still have a few relatives up there, but quite a few family groups of my family moved to Florida, as a lot of people do. There's a lot of emigration out of West Virginia.

*Q: Yes, of course. What was growing up like? Do you have sisters and brothers?*

COOK: No, I'm an only child.

*Q: Mother and father's names?*

COOK: Mother's name is Vivian. My father's name was Nash.

*Q: N-A-S-H?*

COOK: Yes.

*Q: What was mother's maiden name?*

COOK: Ballard.

*Q: Were they from West Virginia of long-time old stock?*

COOK: They were both well-known settler families in West Virginia from the early days.

*Q: What period is that, that West Virginia was settled?*

COOK: They were there before the Civil War. I know mother's family was. West

Virginia was born at the time of the Civil War over the slavery question. She's told me that my great-great I don't know how many great-grandfathers had about 200 slaves and that they were released at the time that West Virginia...

*Q: Is that so?*

COOK: Yes. West Virginia joined the north and abolished slavery. I could have my West Virginia history a little mixed up, but I think that's...

*Q: What sort of farming did they do?*

COOK: It wasn't so much farming, they were merchants - my grandfather owned the local general store. They did some general farming that was basically just to keep up their own lands and feed the family. They had "large" farms. It wasn't farming in the sense it is today.

*Q: You were an only child, but did you grow up with any cousins?*

COOK: I had cousins on my mother's side of the family, but each of her brothers and sisters, with one exception, also only had one child.

*Q: Is that so?*

COOK: And a lot of us were close together in age so we were sort of raised together as brothers and sisters. On my father's side, he only had one brother who never married. So it's a family that had very few grandchildren.

*Q: Yes. How about grandmother and grandfather?*

COOK: My grandfather on my father's side died before I was born. My grandmother died, I think, after I came into the Foreign Service. My grandmother on my mother's side did likewise, and so did my grandfather. I knew them when I was younger, but not as close as some people do because we moved away.

*Q: Not to any of them.*

COOK: Well, I was when I was very young, but when we moved away... I was in third grade; I didn't see them.

*Q: Did they have much of an influence on you?*

COOK: I think my grandmother on my mother's side. I'm cited as being her true descendant.

*Q: Do you think that's true?*

COOK: In some ways it is. I think for her outspokenness and for her independent spirit. In some ways it's not, because she didn't believe in education for women and she was also very fundamentalist in her religious views.

*Q: Was she? She didn't believe in women getting above themselves?*

COOK: Yes.

*Q: What about your mother, what kind of a person is she? Were you pretty close to your mother?*

COOK: Yes, I am close to my mother. We still spend vacations together. My father died last September, September before last, now. Mother came on out very bravely to Egypt [Cook was then the American consul general in Alexandria, Egypt.] to spend last Christmas with me. This was right in the middle of all the hijacking scares, as you know, and she'd never traveled alone anyplace before. She came right through, even did the transit in Athens and all that time that was going on, and we spent Christmas together trying to comfort each other. We were a very, very close family. It's very hard for us being alone. I'll be going down to spend Christmas with her now and she came up to help me get in the house when I arrived back from Egypt. We're spending a lot of time together now.

*Q: Good. Is your mother a career person, too?*

COOK: No, she's not.

*Q: She was a typical homemaker?*

COOK: Yes she was. I think I resemble my father more physically and in terms of...

*Q: What sort of business was your father in?*

COOK: He was a schoolteacher.

*Q: And school was pretty important in your life?*

COOK: School was extremely important in my life. I always had my homework done, and they always expected me to be top in the class.

*Q: They did, and you were? Tell me, when you were little, who did you play with?*

COOK: Really with my cousins, generally. I'd had some cousins in Florida also, sort of the same age. So basically my cousins and friends in the neighborhood. When we moved to Florida we lived more out in the countryside than in town for the first few years we were there, so it wasn't as if I grew up in an urban neighborhood. I really had to get in a car to go someone else's house. I was in the Girl Scouts and we did all of those things

kids do.

*Q: What kind of games did you play?*

COOK: I think I - I haven't thought about that. When I was very young I went through the whole doll phase. I remember that. Mother still has some of the things. Later it seemed to me I was kind of an office - I played games about working in an office or...

*Q: Did you?*

COOK: Yes.

*Q: Play school or library? That kind of thing?*

COOK: I think there was so much in my family I didn't need to. [laughs] There were a lot of school teachers.

*Q: Sure. Did you play physical games?*

COOK: I was never, unfortunately never was and still am not, much into sports. I didn't climb trees. I have never been a good swimmer. I went through Girl Scouts and got all the sports badges you need to get, including horseback riding. I'm still scared of horses but I managed to get my badge in it. I've never been back on a horse since the day I got my badge!

*Q: Sports aren't a big part of your life?*

COOK: It's not. I wish I had more time for exercise. I don't know if I'd do it, frankly, if I had the time. It's just not an interest of mine. It's bad. At my age I should be doing more.

*Q: Did you play more with boys or more with girls? Of course it would depend on who you lived near. I understand that.*

COOK: I think it was about equal. One of my best friends, I know, in West Virginia, was a young boy who was born about the same time and his parents were friends of my mother. In my own family most of my cousins were girls, but in Florida someone I was quite close to but then it was more junior high school and high school was a cousin who is a male cousin. But my best friends were generally girls.

*Q: Were you an early reader, Frances?*

COOK: Yes.

*Q: What kind of books did you like to read?*

COOK: Nancy Drew. [laughs]

*Q: Went right through them all?*

COOK: I went through them all. But in fact it was a book that decided me on going into the Foreign Service. That book played a very important role in my life. I hope I can come up with the title [Diplomatically Speaking]. I have a thesis at home that will tell me what the title is. I don't recall it right now. We've always been surrounded by books in our house. Mother belonged to all the book clubs in West Virginia and Florida. My father always got National Geographic. There was always a lot of that kind of atmosphere in the house. One time I think I was ill when I was in sixth grade, and I didn't have anything in the house I particularly wanted to read, so I read one of her books. It was a memoir written by someone who had been ambassador to the court of Siam. I don't remember the title. I read that book and got so interested in the Foreign Service that even in the sixth grade I wrote away to the State Department to find out what you had to do to join the Foreign Service. I wrote to Dante Fascell, who was my congressman, and both of them sent me back the information. And then the next year in the seventh grade when we were learning to write themes, one of the themes assigned that year was, "What you would like to do when you grow up." And the title of my theme was "My Career in the Foreign Service."

*Q: Is that so? Isn't that interesting. You were one of the few who really knew what you wanted all along.*

COOK: Never changed, after seventh grade I never changed.

*Q: That's wonderful.*

COOK: I went through all the nursing phases and firemen phases that kids go through before that. But from seventh grade on I never really wavered.

*Q: What about it appealed to you?*

COOK: It's a little hard to tell now. I think I'd have to go back and read my theme. I think the foreign part of it is what appealed to me. I haven't changed in that. I'm still happier as a field officer. That really hasn't changed. I'm less thrilled now than I was at that age with the whole idea of this traveling. If I have a vacation now, I don't travel. I go someplace to rest. The first five years in the Foreign Service, if I had a vacation I would take a trip someplace.

*Q: You wanted to see everything.*

COOK: That's worn out of my system now, but I still like working in foreign cultures.
*Q: When you moved down to Florida, Homestead, Florida, you told me the other day, that was quite a change geographically. Was it difficult for you to become used to living...?*

COOK: I don't recall the period frankly that much, and I don't have negative memories of it. I think it might have been a great adventure at that time. Probably a little bit glamorous in the West Virginia context. It was unusual perhaps for some people in the area, but not for our family. My father always, even in the summers when he was a schoolteacher and getting a very low salary in West Virginia, would go someplace else and work for the summers. So there was always a little wanderlust, I think.

*Q: And you would go with him, you and your mother?*

COOK: Sometimes I would, sometimes I wouldn't, depending on where he was going. He did that even as a young man, took a Model T and worked his way across the country, which is unusual for people in that area.

*Q: I should say it is. Did your mother teach you the homemaking skills?*

COOK: Yes, she taught me some, but often she would give me the choice of either studying or practicing piano or washing dishes. I practiced a lot of piano as a consequence. [laughter] She was not, I don't think, overly strict on me about keeping my room clean or doing my own clothes. Most of my cooking is self-taught although, she's a superb cook, but I don't recall cooking very much (at home).

*Q: That must be why, because she was so good.*

COOK: She was so good and I really taught myself to cook later when I was in Australia, because I missed Paris so much and wanted French food. I taught myself to cook using Julia Child. I could kind of do simple things before that, but I never really did much cooking at the house.

*Q: What about sewing?*

COOK: I took one sewing course because it was required in junior high school and I made one dress and one apron and that was the end of my sewing career. I don't even hem things now. I have to have them done.

*Q: What sort of a high school did you go to?*

COOK: It was a rural high school.

*Q: A regional?*

COOK: The place I grew up was called Homestead, which is a farming community 30 miles south of Miami. It's the last city on the mainland, so most of the people there are - there are sort of three categories, sort of original Homesteaders, people who had been there a long time, which was the smallest. A tremendous number of kids from the air force base. There was a big strategic air force base there. And then various other sorts of folks who happened to be living there temporarily or over an extended time. The real

Homesteaders are farmers. That's a very rich agricultural area and so forth. So this high school - there are many more now in southern Florida, it's much more populated than it was when I graduated from high school in 1963 - but they were mainly... the Future Farmers of America and so forth. I was in all of the honors classes but it was in no way a laboratory school like you hear about in Chicago and so forth. It was really a rural high school.

*Q: Sure. What sort of extra curricular things did you do?*
COOK: I was editor of the school yearbook. I had various offices, student government and so forth. I was never president of the student government. In junior high school I was - they have an annual queen - I was queen of the junior high school, which was an elective office in junior high school. My senior year I was in the homecoming court. I wasn't homecoming queen.

*Q: They make a lot of that down there, don't they?*

COOK: Oh, they do. It's very important in rural schools. The only thing I ever ran for, I think - and didn't get - that my father told me beforehand that he hoped that I wouldn't get, was cheerleader. I had a brief passing sort of fancy with being a cheerleader. He said it's just not you and I hope you don't get it. That was a shock to me because I think it was the first time in my whole young life that he'd ever not wished me well. I was also in acting and I was awarded the best actress prize my senior year. I was voted the most likely to succeed. I'm sure you get the same thing from everybody that you're interviewing.

*Q: Well, no, it varies. So far, they've all been outstanding achievers, but they achieve in different things sometimes.*

COOK: The thing I was very involved in in high school and college, which I've had to drop completely since I've come into the Foreign Service, my real love from the age of 13, was politics.

*Q: Politics?*

COOK: Yes. I was always involved less in student politics than in, if I can say this, real politics. I was chairman of the Teens for Kennedy when I was 13 and 14 for the whole county. I worked my first campaign for Dante Fascell, the same year when I was 13 and we're still close. I see him when I'm here. He's now very prominent in Washington.

*Q: Indeed he is.*

COOK: I've known him for a very long time. I would often be involved on Saturday evenings and so forth, working, and it wouldn't just be the national campaigns. I would work in the local races for judge, whatever it was that I thought I could support somebody. At the end of high school I received an award from the Miami Herald which is something they give - every June they give 12 for graduating seniors for all of Dade

County (Miami), which is a very large county - and I won the award. I think it was the only time anybody in my high school had won it for the category, that was called Social Sciences, but it was basically for the political work, organizing.

*Q: What did you do, speak, go around and give speeches?*

COOK: No, I would go around and work in the headquarters and really just work on getting voters out, getting them enrolled. I would lick envelopes, anything that needed doing. I loved politics. It was in my blood. It stayed in all the way through college where I was president of the Young Democrats.

*Q: You must have been very mature, though, to do that at the age of 13, to have that interest?*

COOK: I don't know. I've been the height that I am and looked the way I am since I was in about the eighth or ninth grade.

*Q: I suppose in your home, too, serious things were discussed?*

COOK: Always, always. I went to Girls' State.
*Q: What's that?*

COOK: That's an important thing still for kids in high school now. It's where one person is chosen out of each high school, a boy and a girl, and I think it's nationwide still. They go to their state capital during a period in the summer when the legislature is out, and they act the roles of state senators and state representatives for a week. Then from that are selected people to go to Boys' and Girls' Nation. So I did that. For that you had to do a public speaking contest, sort of, and they chose you for that. I was always involved in those kind of public affairs issues.

*Q: Did you go to the national?*

COOK: No, I didn't. It was in Tallahassee. I think it was the first time I traveled alone. I'm not sure. I took a bus from Miami to Tallahassee, which is a long trek. That was in fact that same summer that I got involved in politics. My father was doing some extra graduate work at the University of Georgia the summer of the Kennedy nomination. I'd just come from Girls' State and went on up to the University of Georgia to be with them and didn't know many people in Athens, so I watched a lot of television and watched the conventions gavel to gavel coverage, both of them. Called the shot on who he (JFK) would pick as his vice president. I remember saying it would be Johnson, which I don't think a lot of people thought at the time. I went out and signed up as a volunteer in that year's gubernatorial campaign in Georgia. I went back to Homestead and started calling around to find out how I could enlist.

*Q: Isn't that terrific. That's very unusual for someone that young to not only know what she's going to do later, but to take time off from buying makeup and trying it on to do*

*something very, very serious.*

COOK: I was never that interested either in high school or in college in student politics. I was always out doing the real stuff. I finally, my senior year in college, became a paid political campaign worker. All the rest of it was volunteerism all those years.

*Q: How did you happen to chose your college [Mary Washington College of the University Of Virginia, Fredericksburg, Virginia]?*

COOK: I wanted to be near Washington because it was politics and government and I have cousins who live here in Washington. One of them was very influential, really, in my choice of career and everything. I came up, I think, again it was the same, very watershed, summer for me. I came up on the train to spend a couple of weeks with them. I spent the entire time sitting in the Congress watching the sessions. I sat in the House. Sam Rayburn was the speaker. It was wonderful to watch him. I went to committee hearings. I didn't spend much time in museums and I love museums. I spent almost all my time in the Congress. I heard about, I don't know how I heard about the school, but I took the bus down to Fredericksburg one day, just to see the campus. Very, very beautiful campus. I don't know if you've seen it.

*Q: It's lovely.*

COOK: I just fell in love with it and it was also a school that, unusually at the time, had a Foreign Service major. So it seemed to combine everything.

*Q: Your parents would let you go wherever you wanted? It was a given that you would go to college?*

COOK: Oh, absolutely.

*Q: Always?*

COOK: It was never any...

*Q: Did your mother go to college?*

COOK: No, she did not.

*Q: Of course your father did.*

COOK: My father went and went and went, as teachers do. He had several master's degrees.

*Q: Were either of your parents very authoritarian?*

COOK: No.

*Q: No, they were just close?*

COOK: We were extremely close. It was a very nice relationship. We did a lot together as three.

*Q: You graduated at the top of your class from high school?*

COOK: I can't remember. I wasn't valedictorian, but I was near the top, I think. I'm trying to remember. The fellow who graduated at the top was a National Merit scholar. I think maybe I was number two or three, I can't remember.

*Q: What subjects did you like particularly?*

COOK: The reason I didn't graduate the top of my class was Phys Ed.
*Q: Phys. Ed.? [Laughter]*

COOK: I always had trouble with that. What did I like? I loved the history courses of course. I think because I saw the diplomacy and the politics.

*Q: Sure.*

COOK: I enjoyed English. My school wasn't a hard school so it really wasn't a whole lot of challenge. I loved my theater classes. What else?

*Q: Any particular role you had that you loved?*

COOK: Yes, I did several. I did *Our Town,* which I guess everybody does at that age. I played Emily Gibb, which was hard for me to do because of the scene of feeding the chickens in the first act. It was hard for me to do, but I finally learned it. I did a Tennessee Williams play which I liked very much. I've always liked Tennessee Williams very much.

*Q: Can you remember which one it was?*

COOK: It was a small one that's not known. It's not a known play, but it was an existential play and it was called *The Case of the Crushed Petunias*. Which is a very strange title, but it was a very interesting play. What else?

*Q: You kept up this interest all through high school?*

COOK: Yes. I was recruited for the first one. Bill Gibbel, the coach, asked me to come to try out for *Our Town* because I hadn't thought about acting. Then I got very interested in it. He remained, until he died last year, one of our family's best friends. We've traveled together. He's visited me at every one of my Foreign Service posts, and came with mother and daddy to France one time when I was living there. He's somebody we stayed very

close to.

*Q: He must have had an influence.*

COOK: Yes, he was from Pennsylvania and he had worked in the New York theater. It was an outside kind of... I think it was again my reaching for a bigger world.

*Q: Any other teachers that you...*

COOK: The faculty advisor on the yearbook was also my English teacher and I think important to me.

*Q: Woman or man?*

COOK: She was a woman. I liked both her style and her intelligence.

*Q: You were more comfortable with older people?*

COOK: Generally, yes.

*Q: Was anything ever said about you possibly going to an all girls school?*

COOK: I chose it, and I was glad that I was at an all girls school when I arrived and when I was there. I don't think I chose it for that reason, but there must have been something in the back of my mind, because I remember most of my letters were to Smith or to Vassar or to something like that. I wrote a few letters. I basically never applied to those schools after I saw Mary Washington, and because it was close to Washington, that's where I really wanted to go. And they had a Foreign Service major which Smith and Vassar didn't. I remember in those times, something about a big state university never really appealed to me. I was more interested in getting on with things and not just going to the ballgames and that kind of stuff. Even when I was at Mary Washington I didn't date college boys. I dated people in [the professions].

I think Smith and Vassar... I basically didn't even apply to them because I liked Mary Washington. That's where I applied. I was accepted on early admissions and went.

*Q: Are you glad you went to an all girls school?*

COOK: Yes, I am. I really am. The girls school since has become coed - I was going to say integrated - coed. I'm kind of unhappy with that. I think a lot of the alumnae are.

*Q: Very few of them say they can afford not to [go coed]*.

COOK: Yes, I think the ones that didn't make that move when everyone was moving about eight years ago are now happy that they didn't. I think there's very special things that you get at those schools that I'm very glad I had.

*Q: Do you want to explore that a little bit, specifically what you feel are the advantages?*

COOK: I think being surrounded by intelligent and interesting women, of which there are a lot, and here I'm talking as much about the professors as the fellow students, I think they gave me role models. I ended up taking all sorts of courses that I never thought I would take when I went to college because I liked the professors so much. I think they had big influences in my life. The smallness of the school I think was important to me.

*Q: How large was it when you were there?*
COOK: About 1,500.

*Q: 1,500, so you did know everybody?*

COOK: Oh, you went to the professors home, they had regular evenings for you. The faculty advisor for the Foreign Service club, now I look at it and laugh, but at the time it was such a big event for me. He would have a foreign ambassador down from Washington about once a month. All the majors would meet at his house and have an evening with this person to talk about his country and about his career. So it was a wonderful kind of sustaining influence about all that. Now the idea of going to hear a foreign ambassador speak doesn't do anything for me, but when you're 19 or 20 it was very impressive. [laughter]

There was a literature professor who impressed me a lot. I even took Latin American studies, an area that I've never been interested in, I think because I'm reacting against Florida. I took Latin American studies because I thought he was so good. They were generally young professors.

*Q: Were they about half and half, men and women?*

COOK: Yes, but it was the younger ones I was close to, except this very elderly German who was our faculty advisor. He really kept my interest in the Foreign Service right up there. I never thought about changing once I got up there. I just got more and more interested.

*Q: What was your degree?*

COOK: It was a BA in Foreign Service.

*Q: BA in Foreign Service?*

COOK: Which is basically a liberal arts major, is what it amounts to. Take an equal part of political science, international economics, a foreign language, and history with a lot of geography thrown in.

*Q: But they actually call it a...*

COOK: Pre Foreign Service.

*Q: Is that so? I didn't know they gave a degree.*

COOK: And they encouraged us all, which I did, to have a junior year abroad. I spent mine in France.

*Q: Where did you go?*

COOK: Aix-en-Provence in the south.

*Q: Your French was good enough?*

COOK: It was. I cried when I first got there because I didn't think I would be able to spend the year because I had trouble understanding. All I had were two years each in high school and in college. I refused to study Spanish. I just wouldn't study it. All they offered was Spanish and Latin in my high school. So I waited until my junior year and they finally got somebody to teach French. So my first foreign language was French. All I had were two years in high school and two years in college. I could read and I could understand, but I couldn't speak fast enough to participate in a conversation. I was very intimidated by my college roommate's French; we went to France together. She was like a sister to me. Her father had been a military officer and had been assigned to SHAFE headquarters. She hadn't lived in France I think for about 15 years at that point, so her vocabulary was a little rusty but her accent was perfect and her comprehension was perfect. It was very intimidating to be with her. I remember sitting crying one whole afternoon about a week after I got there. I thought, am I going to spend a year in this?

*Q: It's awfully hard, isn't it, when you're learning a new language.*

COOK: Yes. But it came. It really comes very fast when you're into it.

*Q: What did you study? Same thing?*

COOK: I did more philosophy and literature there. A little political science, but there were interesting people. I was going through... I guess my great writer hero through college, which I indulged in in France, was Albert Camus. There are several people in southern France, because that's where he lived, who were friends of his. So I took all sorts of philosophy and literature courses that had to do with Camus. Did a lot of work on the existentialists. I was more interested in that than I was in...

*Q: You read all the time, I suppose?*

COOK: Yes.

*Q: Did you travel much around France?*

COOK: Yes, we did. The school took us on several trips the first couple of months, but after that I... There are still areas of France after all the years I've lived there that I haven't seen. We went about two weeks early and spent the first two weeks in Paris, which was my first trip away from Florida.
*Q: That must have been a nice way to start out your traveling.*

COOK: We went on these famous... I don't think they run anymore, but they used to have student ships that only took students back and forth. It was absolutely mind-boggling, a broadening educational experience. We actually stayed with friends of my college roommate, friends of her parents from the time they were there, French people. So I went straight into a French family the minute I arrived. In Aix we had a room in a woman's apartment so we weren't really with a family down there, but we did get our French in the school.

*Q: What was the school, by the way?*

COOK: It's called the Institute for American Universities. Jeane Kirkpatrick was one of the founders of it, I found out later. She wasn't teaching there this year. But the advantage of it for anybody going over to spend their junior year is that it's fully accredited in New York state so you don't have to spend the summers in summer school making up credits that you've lost. I spent my summers in college working in Washington, saving money to go to France.

*Q: What kind of work did you do?*

COOK: I got a patronage job from Senator Byrd of West Virginia. At that time it was during the Kennedy administration. They had a huge program that hired college students in summer in all the government departments. Because I was trying to save money to go to France, I had a patronage job at the Post Office Department, which is nothing I was interested [in.] I was a secretary. But what this job gave me... I was hired by the city post office and detailed to the Post Office Department, which gave me a much higher salary. So it helped me.

*Q: That was a good break, wasn't it? Where did you pick up your secretarial skills?*

COOK: Just learned to type in high school, that's all.

*Q: Just typing. The sixties, of course, were a time of great ferment on American campuses. Did that impact on you at all?*

COOK: Yes, I got involved in the civil rights movement, and did participate. I used to invite very provocative people to speak at the Young Democrats Club at the college, people whose names now escape me, but they were very prominent at the time, some of the people that started the civil rights movement at the University of North Carolina, which is where it really started. I wouldn't exactly call myself a demonstrator, but I was

at Lafayette park the day of the demonstration about Bull Connor's actions in Alabama [Bull Connor was the chief of police in Birmingham, Alabama during the civil rights demonstrations.].

*Q: You didn't go on any of the freedom marches?*

COOK: No. But I did appear at the White House when things got very bad for the Freedom Fighters. No, I didn't go "down south."

*Q: What about all the campus unrest? That started around '64.*

COOK: I think it might have hit there later, but there wasn't much campus unrest (in Fredericksburg). Vietnam was starting, of course, even when I was in France, but it didn't hit the campus, at least my campus that much. I think it probably came later at girls' schools in the south.

*Q: What year did you graduate from college?*
COOK: '67.

*Q: '67. That would be right smack in the middle, wouldn't it?*

COOK: Yes, I was in France '65-'66. Now I became very infused with the anti-war fever my last year in college and the only hesitation I ever had about coming in to the Foreign Service, was I was unsure if I could come in under those conditions. When I took the test, I passed it and I was very amazed that I had passed it, and decided really to come in because it was something I'd always wanted to do, but I wasn't sure that I even wanted to work for the government (anymore). I was really quite emotional. I was not informed on Vietnam. I was very much caught up in the student thing. I came to Washington and discovered that most of my entering class was, too.

*Q: Was [everyone] as emotional as you?*

COOK: Yes. And were concerned about it and were unsure that they wanted to work for the government. I remember our JOT [JOT – Junior Officer Training] class, they had the assistant secretary for Asia come address us, because that was the time of the march on the Pentagon, to defend government policy on Vietnam. He had a very difficult session with our class. But I know that a lot of people in the class were planning to and did - I didn't because I was looking for apartments that day - march on the Pentagon. I remember we had several sessions on it with our JOT class because people weren't sure if they were going to be spied on, if they were going to be fired, or whatever. And we basically were given permission to march because they told us it was an American right. They also explained very carefully to us what our role would be in articulating Vietnam policy abroad. I remember that was a very important session for that class. There were people - what was the radical student group? SD... Do you remember?

*Q: Yes, Students for Democratic Society?*

COOK: Yes, there were SDS members in this class. The class was the full spectrum. I don't know if they're still in the Foreign Service. I haven't kept up with some of them. The class was really quite radical on the subject. It was unusual to have an assistant secretary of state come talk to a JOT class, but they did it because the class was getting so agitated. Because we really were straight off the campuses and were very much a product of this.

*Q: Oh, yes.*

COOK: And it concerned us very deeply. I remember this whole attitude. I learned within two years how ignorant I was, really, of the facts and the issues because I ended up as a member of the Paris peace talks delegation. I'm jumping around, but at that point I was so shocked by my own ignorance and so impressed, as anybody would be, with the caliber of people I was working with, David Bruce, Philip Habib, Governor Harriman, Bill Jordan. John Negroponte and I were junior officers together, so was David Engel, Dick Holbrooke, Bob Miller. Steve Ledogar, all these people. I was working with what I still believe were the best officers the State Department ever produced.

*Q: The cream of the crop.*

COOK: I was so impressed with their dedication and their intelligence. I was really quite embarrassed about my emotionalism on the subject - when you work with Phil Habib you work seven days a week and love every minute of it. But I found even those seven days a week, when I'd go home in the evening, I was taking on every book they had in the library on Vietnam, and spending my evening hours reading on Vietnam. And learning a great deal that I didn't know when I had these very strong views. It was a very good growing up, a lesson for me. I think it was really the caliber of the officers I was working with that so impressed me. When we were sitting and screaming on the campuses we felt all demons or something were behind policy and in Paris I realized what intelligent and sensitive and good people were involved in it. I was the only non-Vietnam specialist on the delegation. It taught me a lot. I did things then that I think I'd be scared to do now, but I was too young to know the difference.

*Q: We want to go into that.*

COOK: That's jumping ahead. It was a very good lesson for me. It taught me a lot.

*Q: To be sure of your facts first before you go criticizing. You took the FSO test when?*

COOK: I took it my senior year in college. In the spring.

*Q: And you passed the first time?*

COOK: Yes, and I do have a recollection about the day of the exam. I remember I was so amazed that I passed. I was a student living on a very strict allowance. I remember driving up from Fredericksburg. I took the oral here in Washington. I don't remember

where, it was someplace downtown. I was so amazed that I passed it, I remember going out and tipping the parking attendant $10 when I took my car out because I couldn't believe it. I wasn't walking on the ground, I was about this high up, you know.

*Q: This was from the written?*

COOK: No, the written you get the notification in the mail, then you have to come for the oral. I was convinced that I wouldn't pass the oral. I remember giving him $10 which was a huge sum back in those days, enormous for me, as a tip. He was smiling a lot as I drove away.

*Q: Now, did they tell you right away that you had passed?*
COOK: They tell you exactly. They put you out in a room for an hour and then they brought you back in and told you. I didn't think I'd passed because I just couldn't... They did something with me that I've since done myself as an examiner. I've never been a full-time examiner but I have "done duty." They looked over my academic record and saw that I had done a lot of European history, philosophy, language and so forth. So they asked me almost exclusively questions on American history, [of] which I'd had literally one course in college, because I'd concentrated the other way.

Some questions I just didn't know the answer to, and I told them I didn't. I felt that would mean that I failed. On the contrary, as I've discovered since as an examiner, I'd rather have someone tell me that than try to bluff.

*Q: Say, "I don't know."*

COOK: Yes.

*Q: It's the way you handle yourself they're after, isn't it? Because you can always look up an answer.*

COOK: But I remember sort of cramming for that test because somebody had told me that I should look at something that my background indicates I wouldn't have any expertise in. I remember I spent the whole evening before with Max Lerner's book *America as a Civilization.* That helped a lot. I met him about a year and a half later and told him I thought he was responsible for my passing the exam. But anyway I passed the oral exam then.

*Q: Do you remember who was on your panel? No.*

COOK: I don't. I remember who ran my JOT class. I don't remember who was on the panel.

*Q: They didn't have the obligatory woman on the panel in those days?*

COOK: I don't think so. I think it was three men.

*Q: There weren't enough, I suppose.*

COOK: I think it was three men.

*Q: Were you ever asked that infamous question they used to ask?*

COOK: Oh, I was asked unbelievable stuff in my security interview, about was it really worth the investment in me since I would probably get married shortly anyway.

*Q: That was the security interview. They didn't ask you that at your oral? They used to. So by that time...*

COOK: They also asked you if you'd ever met a Communist. That was the security interview. Of course I'd met lots of them because of my college professor who brought diplomats down from Washington.

*Q: He brought the diplomats down from other embassies.*

COOK: He had a blend. He had eastern Europeans with Indonesians with whatever. And so of course I'd met some ranking communists. Most people said no. Those were the kind of questions they asked us back then.

*Q: Did the security interview come after the oral?*
COOK: It came after. I think it was part of the background check. It seemed to me that it... I thought it came after... I guess it couldn't come after you were in. Maybe I had to come up and do that. I remember I had to come up here to take the written too, at some high school in Washington.

*Q: Oh, did you?*

COOK: Yes.

*Q: You came up here. Your college, then, didn't have a cram course for the Foreign Service test in the sense that Georgetown did?*

COOK: No, I had no special briefing. I think most of us in the Foreign Service now wonder if we could pass it.

*Q: I know.*

COOK: If we had to take it again. There's so much math in it now which there wasn't.

*Q: Is that so? It was a one-day thing?*

COOK: The written test was an all day test. We spent most of the afternoon on essays.

*Q: And then what about your language? When did you do the language?*

COOK: I had the language test after I was in. They had changed that.

*Q: They keep changing it back and forth.*

COOK: Yes, they do all the time.

*Q: And you took it in French, of course?*

COOK: Yes.

*Q: And how did you place?*

COOK: I didn't do as well as I should. I think because I was nervous about the tests. What happened was that's when we had a budget-induced OPRED (operation reduction in staff, which threw confusion in the Foreign Service system for a period) right when I was supposed to go out to France. So to keep me on hold I think - I got 2+2+ in French because I was nervous on the testing - they put me on hold for six weeks or something and I just sat in French class and got a 3-3. It all worked out.

*Q: It can be very stressful.*

COOK: I was very nervous. I've always been nervous when I've gone through those tests. Language tests make me - and I don't know.

*Q: Some people do have trouble with tests.*

COOK: We always blamed it on the French department. [laughter]

*Q: Many of the things on this list, of course, don't apply to you because you are of a generation well after this. But let's start after you came in.*

COOK: I did, by the way, I did very poorly in college my first year or two because I don't think I'd been stretched, really, in high school. I didn't know how to study. Did very poorly. My senior year I took a terrible overload and was on the dean's list the whole time. It changed greatly, but I had a rough time when I first got there.

*Q: So your public school, in other words, in a southern rural town, really penalized you.*

COOK: I was in all the honors classes but I think... I don't want this to sound wrong. I wasn't stretched. And when you get to college you are. I didn't really know how to study. It came easily in high school. In college, you have to study. I was always in honors English class, but I basically never had a solid grounding in grammar, English grammar, because I was always in honors classes. The honors classes in my school meant you

didn't have to take a spelling test, you studied Shakespeare. You really didn't have to learn the stuff, so when I ended up with a college freshman English teacher who's love in life was grammar, I had a very rough time.

*Q: Oh, I can imagine.*

COOK: Very rough time. I think I used language correctly but I couldn't do the analytical [part]. So it was hard for me.

*Q: Do you feel the analytical approach to grammar is a good thing? Is it worthwhile, or do you think...?*

COOK: I think you need that solid grounding. I think you need it very early and I think you need to be drilled on it until you know it. I think it's just... One of the most important Foreign Service skills, is the ability to draft. It's one of the main reasons people don't do well in the Foreign Service because they can't draft. To become a better writer is very hard if you don't have the basic grammar. I think it's one of the things that tends to be... I think it's minimized a bit in the admissions to the Foreign Service. People don't realize until it hits them, sometimes negatively, how important the writing skills are for their success. I don't know if they even still do the essays. Because it's multiple choice test so they don't really look at your writing. I don't know how much the essays count or if they still do them. I had a little trouble with writing when I first came in and I was counseled on it. I think now my writing is fine, but it was wordy and too personal and all the kinds of stuff that you do. I think the JOT class now has been changed to emphasize that. But when I came in it wasn't emphasized. It's something that I just had to be brought up on, counseled on, and had to work on.

*Q: That is absolutely a very vital skill. It's amazing how many of you have had the same troubles.*

COOK: I've sat on a lot of selection panels now, been chairman of one promotion panel, and I was a member of the recent performance standards board. Writing, if it's in there repeatedly as showing no progress, holds you back. Particularly for pol and econ officers, but it's really across the board. And writing is first of all important for writing OERs [Officer Evaluation Reports]. They have to be well-written to make them worth reading.

*Q: Exactly. You took the exam, you came up and took the oral. How soon, was that after you graduated from college?*

COOK: No, I passed the oral when I was still in my senior year in college. I went home for the summer and came in in September. The summer I worked as a secretary again, and I think I probably should mention that summer because I met someone who became a major personage in my life. I couldn't get a job, so I went to work for one of those temp agencies as a secretary. I [was] just trying to find anything to do because I didn't want to sit at the house and there really weren't many summer jobs.

My first assignment was at a travel agency on Miami Beach. My second assignment (where I stayed for the rest of the summer) was in the corporate (family) offices of a very dynamic young Hispanic-American member of the state legislature. His name was Maurice Ferré, and he went on to become mayor of Miami and a major figure in the national Democratic Party. Eventually he ran (unsuccessfully) for the US Senate. I've never known a politician in I believed in more. (I thought he should run for president!) We became great friends that summer - and my friendship with him and his family grew throughout my career.

*Q: Tell me about any major events you can recall from early childhood.*

COOK: The most dramatic was falling out of the family car (traveling at 45 mph) at age three and landing on my face. Asked, apparently, to check whether the back seat door (which opened from the [front] in the '40s) was locked, I lifted the handle and was thrown out by the force of the wind on the door. Although I was quite battered and bloody, I have no recollection of the incident - though my parents have told and retold the story to me.

COOK: Then about four years later I stepped on a large tin can. Mother was planting some flowers in the garden, and she had them in a coffee can, the ones she was going to transplant. I stepped on it and cut my foot half off, this foot, and lost a tremendous amount of blood and had a lot of stitches. It's right in the part of your foot that tickles, of course.

*Q: How awful.*

COOK: But I survived that, too. And I remember that a little bit. I think I was seven.

*Q: So you had to stay home from school for that. Did you have to have a special tutor?*

COOK: No, just until it was summertime, so I think I was okay. And the incident when I was three years old, of course, there were no kindergartens or anything in West Virginia, so I was home.

*Q: So you didn't really lose any, you didn't have to make up a year or anything like that?*

COOK: No. But there were no severe ailments. I had measles. I never had mumps, just the whooping cough, standard sort of thing. No broken bones.

*Q: Good. You had said that you weren't particularly athletic so you wouldn't be falling out of trees.*

COOK: Unless somebody pushed me. [laughter]

*Q: Were the Ballards and the Cooks of English extraction?*

COOK: Yes, I think so, completely, and of very much a pioneer stock. They were all, on both sides, settlers in West Virginia from other states. From states that had been settled earlier, but they'd been there a very long time on both sides.

*Q: Pioneer stock. Did religion play much of a role when you were young?*

COOK: That would be a hard question to answer. Yes, it did. It was terribly, terribly important in the family, in the extended family. It was not something that my parents were ostentatious about. You just went to church every Sunday as part of the week. It was something that you did. We each belonged to the individual church organizations. I belonged to the Methodist youth. Mother to the women's organization, Daddy to the men's organization. But it wasn't something that overtook our lives. It was just a normal part of our lives. I went to church camp at one point, I remember, when I was in junior high school.

*Q: Do they have a youth organization for young women the way they have the DeMolay for men?*

COOK: Yes, the Rainbow Girls. I joined Rainbow Girls. My father was a Mason and I joined the Rainbow Girls.

*Q: So that gives you a real American... typical... you can really communicate with your fellow Americans. That's such a part of American life. What grade level did your father teach and what subjects did he teach?*

COOK: His career is hard to explain to you. My father became a principal of the school as soon as he graduated from college in West Virginia and he stayed a principal through his whole career up there. When he came to Florida, he was a wonderful teacher and he wanted to get back to teaching. And one of the other primary reasons they came to Florida, at least what they've told me, was they wanted better opportunities for me. So when he went to Florida, he always declined administrative positions, so taught various grades in elementary school, and near the end concentrated almost exclusively on science, which is what he really loved. But he had been a school administrator for over twenty years when he went to Florida.

*Q: Was that a middle school, high school, or?*

COOK: It was elementary and junior high school together, I think, in West Virginia.

*Q: And then he subsequently did the...*

COOK: The teaching and that's what he really loved.
*Q: Principally science. And you said that he kept going back for more accreditation.*

COOK: Yes indeed. He did a lot of it in summertime. I think he had about two masters by the time it was over. He never went on for doctoral studies.

*Q: Well, it wasn't necessary.*

COOK: No.

*Q: Did you have any summer jobs while you were in high school?*

COOK: Let's see. Yes, I did. One summer I worked in a dress shop and that grew out of, I think - the high school band, to raise money, had wrapped Christmas packages at that shop, the various members of the band, and I believe that grew into a summer job working in the dress shop for me.

*Q: Now what instrument did you play?*

COOK: I had piano from the time I was very young, and then I played the clarinet,

*Q: Clarinet in the band.*

COOK: Then at one point, I guess at the end of my junior high school years, my parents had the idea that I could get a university scholarship by playing the oboe. So I tried to learn the oboe and I went to summer band for one week and couldn't get a sound out of the instrument! So, I gave it up and went back to clarinet. The oboe requires phenomenal lung power which I don't...

*Q: Does it?*
COOK: Oh, it's unbelievable. The oboe and the bassoon are just...

*Q: They're awful, are they?*

COOK: When I see somebody play those sweet melodies in Mozart I just... Anyway, I didn't have an oboe career. [laughter]

*Q: You did not. You did not have an oboe career. Can you recall the name of the book you read when you were thirteen that decided you to be in the Foreign Service? I thought if I sprang it at you quickly you might be able to remember.*

COOK: I think it was *Diplomatically Speaking*. I have my seventh grade theme actually here in Washington. I will look at the theme and give it to you. It's in the big curlicue writing you do when you're in the seventh grade.

*Q: I know.*

COOK: First time on unlined paper and all that.

*Q: And this was the seventh grade. You did a report.*

COOK: Yes. “My Career in the Foreign Service.”

*Q: “My Career in the Foreign Service.” Has your career been anything like...?*

COOK: It was very funny because I was looking around for pictures to put on the cover. You had to have an interesting cover on your themes in junior high school. I found some pictures of Paris that my uncle brought back from World War II, black and white pictures, and that's what I put on the cover of my theme. And that was my first post!
*Q: Isn't that a coincidence? Paris pictures. You mentioned last time that you know the Kennedy family. Would you mind going back over that? You began working in the Kennedy campaign. How did you get to know the Kennedy family?*

COOK: I got to know them through the Foreign Service. When I was in Paris, Sarge Shriver was the ambassador there. Before they went to France the State Department offered Mrs. Shriver a staff assistant Foreign Service officer position. I went there as a JOT on a regular rotational assignment. It was first encumbered by someone who, I think, was on second or third tour named Genta Hawkins (Holmes) who was a very good friend [Genta Hawkins Holmes was appointed ambassador to Australia in February 1997.]. You’ve probably heard of her. She's a wonderful officer. Then she moved on to the embassy and then I was asked to take the job. I had it for about a year. So it was technically... I think on the staffing pattern it showed as staff aide to the ambassador. It was actually Eunice (Shriver)’s aide. I think it was a watershed year for me in many ways. I think largely because most young people in the sixties were really very idealistic. One of the things that they idealized were the members of the Kennedy family. I obviously met a lot of the Kennedy family and their friends during that period. I developed a particular fondness for Rose Kennedy, whom I saw a lot and whom I saw even after the Shrivers left France. I'm an enormous admirer of Eunice Shriver’s probably more than she even knows. But I watched how hard she worked. She worked so hard in Paris.

*Q: Helping him in his work?*

COOK: Both, but you know her special field is mentally retarded children, Special Olympics and so forth. She had a lot of assistants for that, who weren't part of the Foreign Service, working at the residence, so I sort of did the other things. But I watched how very, very hard she worked at it. She often would... When, say groups of American schoolchildren visited France on a school trip or something, she would have them to the house and talk to them about their responsibilities to help people because they were very privileged. Obviously they were if they were going to the school they were going to, if they were on this nice trip to France, and therefore they had been given privileges that most people in America never had, and they had an obligation to their fellow Americans because of this. She really lived that. She had an enormous impact on my thinking. The public image of the Kennedies is such a glamorous one, and they are glamorous. But they work incredibly hard.

*Q: They're all hard workers.*

COOK: Yes. Leaving aside their political views, they play just as hard as they work. They go at it full bore. She did a wonderful job raising those five children. Just to watch her operate and so many of the things that I later did, I realize when I became ambassador to Burundi, which was an enormous difference in scale between Paris and Bujumbura, I unconsciously was picking up a lot of her mannerisms just because I admired her so much.

*Q: What year was this?*

COOK: This was, let's see, I left Paris in '71, so it must have been '69 to '70.

*Q: That was your first overseas assignment.*

COOK: Yes. Rose Kennedy stayed at the house a lot. Really all the members of the family came through. We have stayed very close since. I come back for the family reunions still. I came back for - I was at Harvard when Sarge and Eunice had their silver wedding anniversary and I came down for it. The kids invited me. Then I came back from Egypt for Maria's wedding to Arnold Schwarzenegger one summer on Cape Cod. It's fun to see them all again, see the cute little babies grow up.
*Q: Yes, of course.*

COOK: Feeling very old watching the kids.

*Q: And how well they're doing, too.*

COOK: They are. They're all doing very well. As busy as they were, they both had 18 hour day schedules, both the Shrivers, they still managed to spend more personal time, I think, with their children, one on one and as a group than many of the younger couples I knew in the embassy who had their first au pair girl. They absolutely had it in their schedule and they did it no matter what was going on. Sometimes people would start arriving early for a reception and they were still upstairs reading a story or something and that was that. They just had a tremendous amount of personal time with their kids. They had nannies and things, but those kids never had a doubt, for a moment, about the love, and the understanding, and who mother and daddy were, and the amount of time given each of them.

*Q: Did Rose give them a great deal of affection and attention?*

COOK: She did and she gave them lots of just sort of wise advice. The great religion, I think, in the family comes from her. I remember one time I sent the driver to the airport to pick her up and he came back without Mrs. Kennedy. I said, "Oh, my god, what's happened?" He said, “She's at church praying.” She goes, still, four or five times a day.

*Q: She still does?*

COOK: Yes.

*Q: Does she really?*
COOK: The Shrivers had masses in the residence. It's one of the first ones I'd ever attended. They would have Jewish friends read the lessons. It was not an exclusive kind of religion for them, it was an encompassing humanitarian kind of view of religion. They were extremely devout and devoted to the Catholic church, but their view of religion was a very broad one. It was important to see what kind of role that played in their lives. But so many things that they did, some of the things, I think, I copied from her, eventually probably came from campaigning. But I thought it was just terribly effective and it always showed the concern for the smaller people involved in some big event. I never saw them go through a motorcade in Paris, that was the period, remember, when we were just sending astronauts up and they had always gone on these big world tours, so they'd all come to Paris. I never saw them go through one of those motorcades, for example, but they did get out of the limousine, and go back, and shake the hand of every motorcycle policeman, all the way in the back. I saw them do that kind of routinely and that's not the kind of thing the French would do.

*Q: No, no.*

COOK: Not even something, really, that many Americans would think about doing because this life can kind of go to your head. You've got chauffeurs and limousines and so forth and you can start thinking this is where you are. But you've got to realize that all the support is there for you, and they're putting their lives on the line for you constantly. Hours you ask them to work, whatever. She always did that. Go back and say something to the chef after a dinner. Constant...

*Q: Those little touches that build morale.*

COOK: It was remembering [the] people [who] weren't so important, because they're what make it all happen. I think that's so...

*Q: It keeps you in perspective, too, doesn't it?*

COOK: I think I would have wanted to do that, but I don't really know if it would have been so ingrained in me, if I hadn't watched her do it. I've never obviously had an ambassador's wife who was more of a public figure, or who had more of her own role to play at the post. But she found the time for that. She also found the time, always, for the children. Those kinds of things are what really matter when it's all over.

*Q: Absolutely.*

COOK: I think it made a very big impression on me. It also made an enormous impression on me, I think, to watch how that kind of residence was run, which I probably in a small way tried to do. I learned protocol there and all these other kinds of things, so it's never been a problem to me, because it (diplomatic practice) just sort of came along

that way, and it's something about which I'm very relaxed and comfortable. They're plenty of things to make you nervous about the public aspect of the job, but I've always been very comfortable with that side of it, simply because I worked in that house.

*Q: That was your very first overseas assignment?*

COOK: Paris was. I had three jobs in Paris.

*Q: But before you went to Paris in '68?*

COOK: I had a little bit of French that was it.

*Q: Oh, really?*

COOK: I came out of JOT training. I came in in the fall. I came in in September after working for Maurice Ferré. Then I had the JOT training, and then some months of French that was that. I went out in May. I landed right in the middle of the May events in Paris, May '68.

*Q: Oh, you did. I see.*

COOK: Then I had a year's rotational job as a USIS officer because I came into USIS, but it turned out, that year, the most interesting job was the very first one that I had, because another important thing happened in May of '68. That was when we opened the Vietnam Peace Talks in Paris. President Johnson was very proud that this was the smallest delegation he'd ever sent to a major international peace conference. How he did that, between parentheses as the French would say, is that they drew heavily on the embassy staff. So I was commandeered to work in our press center (because I was a USIS officer), which was the entire ballroom of the Hotel Crillon. I forget how many hundreds, I think at least six hundred journalists came from the United States to cover the opening of the Vietnam peace talks. Every journalist that I had ever heard of or seen on television the whole time I was growing up was there. Walter Cronkite, Charles Collingwood, you name it, they were there. And I was working with them a week after I got off the plane. It was a very exciting way to start. Then I was asked in the course of that year because my French was...

*Q: This was your rotational?*

COOK: Yes, but it ended up being my first six months in my job, I didn't really rotate because the needs were there for what I described. Even when I went on then to do some rotational work, after they closed down the major press room (after it was clear that we were in for a long haul on Paris), I was sent as the American government representative to the North Vietnamese press conferences. Now, they were held, the peace talks were generally on Thursday, and the North Vietnamese would give their press briefing in one place and we would give ours in another afterwards. But we would wait until theirs was over. So I had to go with a tape recorder and take full notes, on their press conference,

and then call our delegation to give them a briefing on what they had said. Our delegation usually had the White House, and the person of - who was the national security advisor for Johnson, the two brothers? - Rostow. They usually had Rostow on the other end of the line and I would be doing a briefing. I had to basically fight with the journalists...

*Q: You mean you were briefing Rostow?*

COOK: Yes, he was on the other end of the line. I had to basically then fight the journalists because there were only a certain number of pay phones at this site where the North Vietnamese had their press conference, and I would have to compose my cable in my head from the time I left my chair until I got to the telephone, and then fight the journalists to use the phone. All I can say is, if somebody asked me to do that now, I'd be too nervous to do it. But when you're 22, you can do anything. The press conferences were only in Vietnamese and French. There was no English used, so I'd be translating and writing my cable in my head and running to the telephone and really, basically competing with the wires to try to do something. Then I would have to go back to the embassy, and I'd completely transcribe the entire text from French to English and do a textual transmission to Washington by *immediate* of the press conference. But it's the kind of thing - as I say I think probably I could do it now, but I think ten years after that, if you asked me to do that, I'd say, "I can't do that." It's the kind of thing you don't know you can't do, so you do it! So anyway I did that. Basically the first year I had a few rotational jobs but it was basically dominated by the peace talks. I was taken away for various things for that. Then the Shrivers asked me to come to the residence when Genta moved into the embassy and I went up there for a year.

*Q: You moved into the residence?*
COOK: My office was in the residence and it was the most fabulous office I'll ever have. I had a Roualt painting. Timmy Shriver is John Kennedy's godson, so we had the crucifix from the Kennedy funeral on the wall. We had, I think, a Picasso. I mean I'll never have an office with a Picasso on the wall. [laugh] I worked at the residence. Sarge was also doing a lot of stuff - that was the period, if you remember, the late sixties, when youth committees were very important in the embassies, and it was terribly important in Paris, because we'd just been through all the student riots. So that was the political thing I did, separate from what was going on at the residence. I worked there for a year. I traveled with Mrs. Shriver. I did political briefings for them. I did everything that you can imagine would go on with a family like that. Plus I met about everybody I think I ever wanted to meet in my whole life, in one year, and I was still only 23.

*Q: Did you really? Hard act to follow. You went to many of the social functions, of course?*

COOK: Oh yes. Yes, I went to most of them. All the people that as a high school kid, from Jackie Onassis to...

*Q: You must have pinched yourself from time to time.*

COOK: I did quite a lot. But it marked me more than I really thought it did at the time, and how I conducted to myself later. Then the Shrivers left. This is in '70, and Ambassador Habib asked me to join the Peace Talks delegation. Because, again I think, because of this stricture on the size of the delegation, this very small delegation, (which were all comprised of Vietnam specialists plus a few lawyers) were being submerged by POW-MIA, congressional, family, state visitors. They were all coming to Paris, if you remember the period, trying to get information about their loved ones. The delegation had nothing set up to handle this, because they were less than fifteen people. The legal advisor from the State Department was handling it because he was basically the expert on the Geneva Convention and so forth for the peace talks, and he was getting so it was taking so much of his time he couldn't do what else he needed to do. So they asked me to come full-time on the delegation to do POW-MIA matters. So I became the only full-time member of the delegation who was not a specialist on Vietnam. Then I resumed the press conference activities, but in that case I had both the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong, who were by there then, and the South Vietnamese. So I did three press conferences on a Thursday plus the cables and the briefings. So on Thursdays I did nothing but press things, but during the rest of the week I worked on the POW-MIA issue. Phil Habib being the kind of officer he is, didn't restrict me either just to handling visitors, but he sought my ideas on the policy once I got into it. I told you last week I got so interested in the subject that even though we were working seven days a week, I found I would check all the books on Vietnam out of the embassy library and take it home and read it at night. I got so absorbed in it. It is by far the best job I've ever had in the Foreign Service.

*Q: Is that so?*

COOK: No doubt about it, it's also the hardest I've ever worked, which probably tells you something about me. I think it's the real reason I've never really thought of changing careers. I've never really had second doubts. I guess I've always wanted to hope to replicate the experience of working with those kinds of professionals, all one group. I realize in retrospect that it was a unique coming together of a lot of very fabulous talent we have in the State Department and it can't be replicated, because it was a "one mission mission," too. But I venerate Phil Habib from that time and still do. We're still very close. A lot of us who were there are going to have a reunion next year. Next year of course will be our twentieth, and it will probably be at my house. So I think we'll all get together.

*Q: I hadn't realized that you had so much experience in refugee [matters]. [At the time of this interview, Cook was Deputy Assistant Secretary for Refugee Affairs.]*

COOK: Some of the names that I discovered when I came into this job were names I'd worked with twenty years ago. It was very interesting. But it was just such a fabulous, I mean the junior officers among that collection were Dick Holbrooke, John Negroponte. Those were the junior officers at the delegation, so you can imagine what the quality was.

*Q: How much do you think having known these people, who are certainly people of influence, great influence, has helped you to rise so quickly?*

COOK: I think the challenges that were thrown at me, during that time, probably helped more. I don't think they've particularly gotten assignments for me, or anything that I can think of.

*Q: But you were able to prove your worth to the people who count?*

COOK: Yes, and I think probably... I'm sure that people still check, because I'm occupying very senior positions now, I'm sure people still check with Phil Habib, because they know I worked for him, because his word is so valuable in this building. It matters a very great deal that he cared.

*Q: Definitely.*

COOK: Then, after about a year, or less than a year, I was joined by the other great non-specialist who worked on the peace talks. We became very, very close friends. I sometimes served as his hostess in Paris and I still see his widow regularly here, David and Vangie Bruce. She's another woman I admire enormously.

*Q: You mentioned her, yes.*
COOK: I still see her and I saw him the whole time until he died. In fact I was with him the night before he died.

*Q: Is that so? You say you sometimes acted as his hostess?*

COOK: Sometimes in Paris, either she would be traveling, or she couldn't attend some function that he was doing, and he would ask me to be his hostess, which was another great honor for a junior officer.

*Q: I should say.*

COOK: I'm not just talking about official things. David Bruce was a wonderful gourmet. He belonged to an informal gourmet club in Paris and I went to two or three of those dinners with him, which were just wonderful.

*Q: Isn't he the one who said he gave his liver for the Foreign Service?*

COOK: I don't know. (Laughter)

*Q: I think so. And he was also a Chevalier du Tastevin, wasn't he?*

COOK: I'm sure he was. That is less of a distinction for American ambassadors in France. I don't want to debunk any of my former bosses.

*Q: You mean they all get those?*

COOK: It's sort of for the asking.

*Q: I see.*
COOK: He did know his wine, though. I don't want to detract from that. David Bruce knew his wine, absolutely.

*Q: Did he not also own a vineyard?*

COOK: Not that I'm aware of. Dillon, Douglas Dillon, owned a vineyard, but I don't think David Bruce did. He used to lay in the good vintages and he'd tell you what they were, when he would come in from a good dinner. And even working for him it was just phenomenal because he's the most distinguished diplomat we've ever had. And the posts he's occupied will never be replicated by anybody. Even working for him, you would sit there in your office one day and you'd see the people who'd come to pick him up for lunch. They were the founders of modern Europe. That's who would parade through that delegation, and he would stop and introduce them. It was just a glorious experience for somebody who was straight out of college.

*Q: Of course, fabulous.*

COOK: The people were always so generous with the people they knew, and they shared it with you. In those early years when I was doing things really way above my head, my qualifications or anything else, I was never ever treated like a junior officer that didn't "need to know." I was always treated as a full partner, and I think that probably influenced my comportment, maybe more than some of my later bosses appreciated.

*Q: When you get up to that level of David Bruce, he doesn't have any hang-ups. That man knew who he was and behaved accordingly. This assignment lasted until 19 - ?*

COOK: '71.

*Q: 'Til '71.*
COOK: And then Frances Cook who had said that she would only come into the Foreign Service if she did not have to serve in Asia, because of the war in Vietnam, sought an Asian assignment. [laughter]

*Q: Because of the work you had been doing.*

COOK: I got so intrigued with it that's the only place I wanted to go. Because I was so new in the Foreign Service, I didn't really do things like writing career counselors, or the things you were supposed to do. It was just (as we used to call him) "Father Phil" was coming back to Washington on one of his frequent consultations, and he said, - he always called all of us in and said, "What can I do for you when I'm in Washington? He did that to the most junior officer on the delegation. He did it to everybody. I said, "I really think I would like to go to Asia." And so Phil, being Phil, called USIA which is my home agency, and I only found out that he had been successful later when I was assigned to Australia. I exclaimed, "Australia, who said anything about Australia?" I found out later

that I had in fact been assigned to Indonesia, but back in those days officers could extend very late, when they got an ongoing assignment they didn't like. If you found out you didn't get an assignment you wanted, you would sort of stay in [place].

*Q: Sure.*

COOK: You can't do that anymore. You have to bid on your own job. But back in those days you could. So the officer I was to have replaced decided to extend, and I was out of Indonesia, but my body, as it were, was in the Asia shop, so they ended up sending me to Australia, which I was just really shocked at. That's nothing I'd asked for. A lot of Americans dream of going to Australia, but I'd had all these years in Europe. I'd been working on Asia. Who wanted to go to Australia?

*Q: Australia is not Asia.*
COOK: I just couldn't stand it for the first year, because I missed Paris so much. But then I liked it.

*Q: Before we leave Paris, where did you live in Paris? What sort of living arrangements did you have?*

COOK: I had a very tiny apartment, which I don't think was much larger than this office, which was divided into three rooms. But it was in a wonderful section [arrondissement], which I still consider kind of my home quartier, and I still go back to every time I'm there because I still know the cheese shops and so forth. It was just off the Place de l'Ecole Militaire in the seventh on Avenue de LaBourdonnais. It was a very small apartment which was all I could afford when I went there as an FSO-8. I started as an FSO-8 step 1, the lowest you can come in. By the time I left I'd been promoted every year. I could have afforded something, I guess, better, but really didn't even think about moving because I didn't have the time, nor the interest.

*Q: You liked your quartier.*

COOK: I loved the section.

*Q: So you got Australia and you were homesick for a year. Now where in Australia did you go?*

COOK: Sydney. I went to Sydney and I was the cultural affairs officer [USIS] out of Sidney, handling New South Wales, Queensland, and what was then the Territory of Papua New Guinea. I didn't get up there, but I did do some programming from there. I missed France a tremendous amount when I first got down there. I played my French records. That's when I taught myself to cook. I went right through Julia Child's book. Every time I had a dinner, every dish came out of Julia Child, until I could do them! I finally relaxed and looked around and saw that the Aussies are about the nicest people in the world.

*Q: Are they?*

COOK: Oh, they truly are. Still some of my closest friends in the world are from Australia. I have a goddaughter there whose father was an IV grantee, who's a young member of parliament. He has since been minister three times. I think he'll be foreign minister and prime minister one day. But his little girl is my goddaughter. Australians, being the most intrepid travelers in the world, even came to Burundi to see me. I left Australia ten years ago and they still showed up.

*Q: The whole family?*

COOK: Oh, yes, everybody. Senior people, chairman of joint parliamentary committees and such. They came to Egypt to see me. I've seen them here. Another group is coming in January. This fellow I knew was just a labor union worker in Sydney who's coming in January. He's coming as chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense. He was a labor union worker. He's Labor party. I know them from both sides. The thing that I got intrigued with in Australia was not the wildlife and the animals and the swimming, which is what everybody else likes. I loved the politics. It related more to American politics than anything I could imagine existing overseas. I would just go around to all of these political meetings. I used the cultural department, because I was programming all these people on International Visitor grants. So I'd go off to these things. I would frequently be the only foreigner at various kinds of political meetings. I was sitting on the front row of the Labor party meeting when Gough Whitlam announced his candidacy to be prime minister of Australia. I thought they were going to get me into trouble because they put the picture on the front page of the Labor party newspaper down there! I used to go around and talk to the Black Panther aborigines. I just found all of it absolutely fascinating.

*Q: I didn't know there were Black Panther aborigines.*

COOK: Yes, and they have taken their constitution directly from the American Black Panther party. They wore the black berets and the whole thing. I would fly out to visit aboriginal reservations with various people we were programming and I really enjoyed it. I found the society fascinating. I'd go back in a minute. I just loved it.

*Q: Now you were there as CAO, but it seems to me you sort of operated the way a political officer would.*

COOK: We didn't have a political officer in our consulate, so the field was wide open.

*Q: I see. Did you do any reporting?*

COOK: Yes, I did.

*Q: Oh, you did?*

COOK: Yes, voluntary.

*Q: Did you? For heaven's sakes! Did you see the art, the aboriginal art?*

COOK: Yes, and bought some of it, yes. I used to have aborigines attend my parties. I lived in this very trendy section of Sydney called Paddington, which is like Georgetown here with brick, terraced houses. I think many of my Australian friends met their first aborigine at my house.

*Q: Is that so?*

COOK: Yes, it was fascinating to me. The whole thing that they were going through there, there were so many echoes. It's different, but still there were things I could recognize as being the same. The openness of the society is wonderfully like ours, not the sort of choreographed politics that you have in France.

*Q: But the people aren't particularly racist, are they?*

COOK: I think those issues are so different from here, that that's where it separates itself enormously. The aborigines really do, at least at that time and I think things have changed since, did live very separately. They are on reservations. The comparison is more to the American Indian than it is to American blacks. But there are elements that go back and forth, because, first of all, many of them are very black. There is some racism, I think, involved. I met some Americans down there, some expatriate Americans who had moved to Australia. I'd meet them out in the outback. I'd go to these big sheep stations and so forth. And they would assume that because I was an American that they could make racial comments to me that I would find acceptable. It was clearly one of the reasons they immigrated to Australia. I would go right back at them <u>every</u> time. They didn't make them to me twice, but they would initially try that out frequently. It wasn't true of all Americans who'd emigrated out, I don't want to give that impression, but I did meet some, particularly in the outback and farming areas. And they made assumptions.

But it was just a wonderful time to be there. It was when Australia was going through this great cultural revival. When they started making all the films that have become so famous now. A lot of that was really launched by Gough Whitlam when he came in. He had an unhappy ending to his prime ministership, but a lot of that was this great political ferment going in the arts. It was almost like the early sixties here. So much was going on. The emphases were very different, their problems are different, but they are wonderful allies. I'd go back in an instant.

*Q: What about the rock paintings? Did you see those?*

COOK: No, I didn't get out. I was only there about nineteen months. I didn't get out to Alice Springs. I did go to Queensland, I did go to Victoria, I went to Canberra a lot.

*Q: It is such a vast country.*

COOK: I used to go to Canberra and do the same thing like I did, I told you, when I was in high school. I used to come up here and sit through hours of the Congress. I did the same thing in Canberra. I went and sat through hours of question time at Parliament because that was fascinating to me. I'd never seen one. Friends of mine who were in Parliament, some of these young people I was sending off on IV grants [who] subsequently became ministers, would take me in and I would just sit there and listen for hours and listen to the debates and so forth. I loved every minute of it.

*Q: Did you? How about the Great Barrier Reef?*

COOK: I did get there on a vacation, yes. Lovely.

*Q: But you are more oriented toward people and the issues, aren't you, than, say, the culture of the people? So about that time you began to think that maybe you didn't belong in USIS, you belonged in the political [branch].*

COOK: It had been a big fight the whole time that I was there, because for example in Paris, out of my three years, I worked one year for USIA. Then when I left the peace talks, Bob Miller, who was Phil Habib's deputy ambassador, came back, I think, to head EXSEC [Department of State Executive Secretariat] and invited me to join EXSEC. And USIA just absolutely refused to even talk to him about it, because they felt I was going to be one of these officers that would be going back and forth. When I left Australia, I saw the Bruces in Hong Kong, just happened to be there when they were in Hong Kong on their way in to Peking for the first time. Then later when Bruce left Peking - remember he went to NATO after that? He was in his eighties and he was still working as an ambassador! He took, I forget who the head of USIA was - I guess by then I was in Dakar - took him out to lunch, to ask if I could be on his staff in Brussels. That was just one more red flag to them, it kept coming. With Bob Miller they purposefully reassigned me very quickly out of Australia. I was moved after nineteen months.

*Q: I was wondering why you were moved so fast.*

COOK: They told him that I had another assignment and they don't break assignments. I'm positive, I haven't talked to the personnel officer, but I'm positive that's what happened. Then the same thing happened again with Brussels. Joan Clark can tell you on that one. She was director of EUR/EX at the time. She told me at the time, she said she'd rarely lost battles that were that mean, trying to get me out of USIA to go work for Bruce in Brussels. So they were just... they saw the handwriting. I loved the cultural program because it was so political. So much of the speakers you would program, almost half of them were on political topics because foreign policy is what we're trying to promote. So you'd be around the politicians, IV grantees, the same kind of thing. Any IV program that I had much to do with obviously were more for the political leaders than it for up and coming...

*Q: Professors.*

COOK: Yes, things like that. I loved the political aspect of being a cultural officer, but my long-term interests really were here at State, not there [at USIA]. And every time they got a high level request like that, they'd [USIA] just arch up their backs even more. I frankly don't know how Dick Moose pulled off my eventual assignment to State [as director of] AF/P. I don't know how he did it. I think they did something again. Each time they had to go to the head of USIA. I don't frankly know how he pulled that off. But then I was able to transfer over later. It was hard. There was a constant fight.

*Q: After these nineteen months they pulled you out of there to prevent you going...*

COOK: That's my understanding that's what happened.

*Q: To Brussels.*

COOK: And sent me off to Dakar. When we joined the Foreign Service in those days you had to list three areas that you would like to serve in and one of the three I listed was Africa, because I had French and I basically listed the three areas that had French. There were more back then, but I listed three. I'd left off Asia, you might recall, so I didn't list any Indochina. So that left me with not too much to choose from. I went there as cultural affairs officer in a country where culture was at least as important, if not more so, than politics under President Senghor [Leopold Senghor, First president of Senegal.]. It was an absolutely phenomenal experience. It launched me in Africa, and I think anybody that starts out in Dakar in Africa - I know of no exceptions, there are bound to be some but I know of none - remains interested in Africa. That really started me. I was a cultural affairs officer, but there my job was very different, too. Part of my job there was teaching an American civilization class at the university. I'd never wanted to be a teacher but I did that.

*Q: Did you enjoy it?*

COOK: It scared me to death. I've never been so frightened of anything in my life, as teaching. As I told you when I took my exam, I hadn't had much American history, so I was sort of one lecture ahead of the students. And in the French system it's not a give-and-take. It's not a class with a discussion, it's a formal lecture where they write down every word you say.

*Q: And feed it back.*

COOK: Yes. I taught it for two years. I loved Samuel Eliot Morrison from that period. I think I can probably still do some of it verbatim. But the other part of my job, which turned out to be the one of the longest range interests and by far one of the closest friendships I've ever had, somebody I also venerate, was with President Senghor. I was his private English tutor.

*Q: Were you?*

COOK: That came with the job, too. I saw him every month. I saw him more frequently, in fact, than the ambassador. Senghor mixed culture and politics in a way that I think is absolutely glorious and obviously responds to some kind of need in me. I couldn't have been happier working with anybody. He would talk politics as easily with me as he would talk culture.

*Q: You were teaching him English?*

COOK: Yes, Frances, who could barely pass freshman English grammar, was teaching grammar to the first African who had ever received a doctorat d'etat in France in grammar! I went once a month, but I would spend two entire days of the weekend before - the class was always a Monday morning - I would spend Saturday and Sunday, entire days, preparing Senghor's lesson, because I was not going to embarrass either the United States, or myself, by not having it exactly right. He is recognized as one of the world's great grammarians.
*Q: Oh, for heaven's sake!*

COOK: Again it's these kind of things where you just get stretched

*Q: I should say you would. Horrible, horrible thought.*

COOK: I basically had three jobs there. I was replaced by two people, which was a great bureaucratic compliment. [laughs]

*Q: I should say. Well now, when you taught this US history, what language were you using?*

COOK: English, in the English department. The class was American Civilization. Because the French underwrite the university there, every year - I hope it wasn't doing anything illegal - every year I got a kind of French government salary, a paycheck, at the end of the year, which I would take and give to buy, for example, milk for children in the village that had a sister city relationship with some city in the States. It gave me great pleasure to cash a French government check, so I would give it out to villages like that, and do things like that with it. But I received it at the end of each term, I remember.

*Q: You got around Africa much?*

COOK: I'd been there just six weeks when I got sent off to a conference in Nairobi, so that was really very exciting again. Got off to see that part of Africa. Then, later on, I went to a conference, I remember, in Lagos. But my real travels came later when I was working in the department. I'd probably been in maybe six or eight African countries by the time I came back. But I developed an absolute love for Africa, and for the people, and for what they always managed to teach me about myself, and about life. I miss it when I'm not there now. My last tour was in the Middle East and I missed Africa, I really did. You've had more tours in the Middle East, but I don't know if you've had that kind of

immersion in Africa

*Q: No, I haven't, only in North Africa.*

COOK: It really gets under your skin. The Senegalese are just so fabulous. They're intellectual. They have a very rich culture. Politics, it's the most democratic country on the continent. The politics were just starting when I was there and so that was a lot of fun, obviously because of the job and because [of] culture and Senghor, I just had total entrée and access to any kind of program you wanted to do.

*Q: What about your living arrangements? I forgot to ask you about those when you were in Sydney. You had a house or...?*

COOK: Yes, I had a lovely little house like in Georgetown. It's called Paddington and it's sort of where the yuppies live. They didn't have that term then, but it's where the architects, the lawyers, the MBAs [lived]. It has lots of quaint little restaurants and so forth. It's a beautiful place. It's actually prettier than Georgetown because it's on a hill overlooking Sydney harbor and the second story of every house has a balcony overlooking the harbor. It's gorgeous. It's really prettier than Georgetown, but it's the same idea. It was a house built with convict bricks which was very pretty, which meant it was quite old. The convicts were sent there by the Brits.

In Dakar I had a wonderful apartment, a huge thing up on the main building in downtown Dakar on the same place where the embassy was and the foreign ministry. It was an enormous apartment for representational purposes, with big balconies on three sides overlooking the ocean. It was really very pretty.

*Q: Overlooking the ocean?*
COOK: Yes.

*Q: You got good views.*

COOK: Oh, yes, wonderful. I still had my eye on the horizon, I guess.

*Q: Did you have help in both of these places?*

COOK: I did. In Dakar I'm proud to say I'm the only person who had a female cook. I'm also proud to say I had the best cook in the whole mission, probably in the city.

*Q: How did you get a hold of her?*

COOK: She worked for somebody else who said, “We think she's pretty good.” She was illiterate, absolutely adorable, a little short woman from the Casamance, from the southern part of the country. She could do Senegalese and French and American with equal flair. Because she couldn't read you'd have to read the recipe to her once and she never... that's all you had to do, was once.

*Q: Really?*

COOK: Yes. And she would work alone, and do dinners for sixty people, with a little help from the men afterwards to wash up. Phenomenal capacity. Just a really good friend. I'd like to go back and see her.

*Q: You couldn't take her with you? She didn't want to come, I suppose?*

COOK: I was coming back to Washington then and it's very hard to... I brought somebody back this time and it's so expensive.
*Q: I know it is, because you have to pay their transportation and everything.*

COOK: And US minimum wage.

*Q: Yes, of course, minimum wage and social security. Do you have to do that?*

COOK: I'm not doing that because I think he's leaving next Wednesday. It's very expensive, but I couldn't have survived these first four months without it because I've been on five trips since I've been here. I couldn't have done it with all the deliveries and stuff that go on when you're moving into a house for the first time. I've always lived in an apartment here. So anyway, I didn't take her with me, but she was superb. Rudy Aggrey was my ambassador in Dakar. He was very distinguished. He was the son of a very distinguished African educator. He had a French wife. A very dignified man, who I think was a very good choice to represent us with Senghor. And that was really my job, too. We had a cultural center so I did programming there. The IV committee, again, was really the access into politics and IV programming and so forth. It was the first place I'd ever in my whole career made calls at foreign ministries, because we had to get the IV programming through them. People think that you grow up in the business doing that, but the kind of career I had, you didn't. I've had huge gaps in my career. I didn't go to a foreign ministry until I was in my third post. I've never been a desk officer. I've never been a DCM, these various kinds of things that happened to people earlier on.

*Q: You leapfrogged.*

COOK: Sometimes when I work with junior officers now I realize that maybe it's the first time they've done this. People assume that I have done it and I haven't. I did various little things. But I remember Dakar being the first place I went to the foreign ministry. I never went to the Quai d'Orsay when I was in Paris, because of the kind of jobs I had. Sydney, I was in the consulate. I've done things in various stages, and I think it's all come together. But it hasn't been in any kind of logical progression, which is what we pride ourselves on.

*Q: You were there two years in Dakar?*

COOK: Yes.

[break]

Let's talk briefly about the two parts of that job where I was a USIS officer, that stretched me, I think, as much as any assignment I've had in the Foreign Service. They were two jobs which normally wouldn't be performed by a Foreign Service officer, but I realize came with that job when I arrived.

One was teaching at the university. I had never taught before, but I became a professor in the English department of American civilization and I gave lectures once a week. And in the French system, as you know, the students basically write down every word you say. It has to be a very formal lecture and the test is based on that. They do very little reading, at least the African students. I'm the person, as you might recall, that only had one American history course in her whole life. I'd specialized in French and European history, so Samuel Elliot Morrison became a very strong companion of mine in Dakar. During the university year I spent the entire weekend before the lecture preparing my lecture on American civilization for that week.

The other thing that I did on those weekends, but this was only once a month, was that part of my job and traditionally was there, was being the private English tutor to the President of Senegal. Now that would be a great honor, I think, in any embassy. But Senghor absolutely frightened me to death, because he is as you probably know, one of the world's premier grammarians. He is the first African to ever receive the doctorat d'état, in France, in grammar. And trying to teach someone like that, and he took very much a grammatical approach - not the FSI conversational approach - meant again that I had to prepare grammar lectures, and deal with one of the great minds of the world on the subject, which was hardly anything that you would expect coming into the Foreign Service! As a result of those meetings with Senghor we became quite close. I really liked him enormously and I worked eventually to get him off of just the grammar approach, and had him doing Faulkner and other things, aspects of American literature which I thought corresponded with the kind of poetry that he would write. He talked to me a great deal about politics during these sessions, because that was what he was involved in. He was also one of the most cultured men on the face of the earth. He was one of Africa's premier statesmen and still is. As a result of these lessons, basically twice he asked me to be his escort officer on official visits to the United States. So it got me into a lot of areas that a very junior cultural affairs officer wouldn't have expected. But in terms of just a job, it was difficult doing those two things because I was as ill-equipped for it, as doing the peace talks in Paris. No one quite totally relaxes in the presence of a chief of state, but seeing him so regularly, so young in my career, I think made it easier for me later to deal that level. I don't mean it to sound arrogant, because I'm never totally relaxed in the presence of a chief of state, but I had that very early on, which is very unusual. Great familiarity, and used to the protocol in the palace and this, that and the other. I found that dealing with someone on his level, and he's so head and shoulders above most African chiefs of state, frankly, I felt that, if I could cope in those sessions with him I probably could handle other things later on.

So those were the two aspects of that job which were a bit unique. I was replaced by two

people when I eventually left Dakar. The other thing that was important for me on the Senegal assignment is that, and I think this is generally true of most young FSO's I know who have served in Senegal, they develop a lifelong love of Africa. I've never really known there to be an exception to that. There's something about the combination of the culture, of the people, of their involvement in African events, and just living there that often turns FSO's, who are as young as I was, into African specialists. At that point I had served in my third geographic area. If I had an expertise at all, it was Europe, because I'd been to school there and I had served there. I basically stayed with Africa after Senegal.

*Q: [By that time] your posts were so different, which one did you find the most interesting? Was it Dakar?*

COOK: I would tell you quite honestly that each one was the most interesting for different reasons. It would be very hard for me to...

*Q: And the same would apply as to whether or not you liked them, because sometimes you like the one that is the most difficult.*

COOK: There are some things I liked and disliked about each one. Sometimes it was, you like the local culture and didn't like your boss, or vice versa. But each one I thought was a growth experience for me. Each one presented very, very different kinds of challenges. I never felt restricted in any of my assignments, at what I could get into, by my bosses. There were some minor exceptions to that and I really resisted and basically overcame it. But I think if I had had a very narrow job, and a supervisor insisted I stayed in a very narrow channel, none of the posts would have meant as much to me as they did. While I was cultural officer I was working in politics. When I was a consul general I was working on commercial things. I was always able to combine it in a way that kept it constantly interesting, at least to me.

*Q: Did you have any difficulties with loneliness abroad? You always lived by yourself?*

COOK: I really never did. I think the exception to that, and this is really more a female perspective than an FSO perspective, I found that in developing countries, particularly, it is very hard to have close female friends among the nationals of the country you're assigned to. That's true for their cultural and educational reasons, namely that, as a single person, it's very hard to be close to a married woman of a foreign culture. They're almost all married.

*Q: There aren't many career women.*

COOK: I find that female support systems are very important for women professionals. They've been important to me through my whole career. They're perhaps more important to me than many, because I don't have any sisters. I always had a lot of friends in the third world among females, but never really the close kind of <u>support</u> relationship that I think is good for you. Now I had those kind of relationships there with Americans and with men and women, but it wasn't that kind of qualitative relationship that you have in

Europe or in Australia or in Washington.

*Q: So that would make it a little bit lonelier. I should think it would be exacerbated the higher up the ladder you go. More visibility. When you're chief of mission, it's lonely at the top.*

COOK: I think that's absolutely true, and you cope in various kinds of ways. One way I've always coped is being a great letter writer, my whole career.

*Q: You keep your circle of friends going.*

COOK: I keep in touch with them. I've been less good on that recently than I used to be. I found I wrote a lot of letters in Australia and Dakar, for example, and keep it going at a distance.

*Q: What about a hardship post as opposed to a non-hardship post? Did you find because they are more difficult, you're putting more of yourself into the assignment?*
COOK: They're more difficult climatically, and in terms of isolation, and in terms of how long it takes to get to a place, and in terms of the diseases, perhaps, you're exposed to. In terms of the living, they frankly are easier for a woman, who has to manage a house, in addition to an office. In these "hardship posts" you have generally a competent house staff, at least you have one you can work with and train. In Washington or in Europe, you have to do it yourself. I think that even in the department currently, there is a great underestimation on what that really means, being a female, or an unmarried male officer. You basically carry two full time jobs, and the job gets much harder to do, and much more time consuming, the higher you go up. Running a residence is a full time job. I've had six years straight of doing that, and I came home really tired. I realize that there was basically no time off, ever. I think the same is true for unmarried male officers. There are very few of them. Where it's more the norm I think for senior female officers, it's unusual for a male officer. But serving in the third world in those conditions, I think, makes that part of the job easier than it would in Europe, for example.

*Q: Because the help is still available?*

COOK: It still is available, and in Burundi it was better than anything I've ever had any place. You can't judge it by the isolation of the post. It was far superior in Burundi, than what I had in Egypt.

*Q: Did you have help when you were living in Australia?*

COOK: Yes, I did. I had a series of non-English speaking Spanish and other maids. It was difficult to communicate with them, and I wasn't there, and I never felt very secure about my house. I had Portuguese maids in Paris and it was just... it wasn't the same. You don't have the support on the other fifty percent of your job that you have in the third world.

*Q: I know. It's the part where you're the most vulnerable, too, your actual physical surroundings, and how often your bed is changed and that kind of thing.*

COOK: I find the hardship post is true on the things I listed. I don't find it's true in terms of what is provided for you to be able to do your job.

*Q: Yes. Now, after Dakar you... let's take this in sequence now.*

COOK: I came back to Washington on assignment.

*Q: You came back to Washington.*

COOK: I became the personnel officer for Africa for USIA. I did that job for two years and I think I punched a very important ticket. I think everybody needs to work in personnel. Having said that, I don't want to punch it twice. Everybody, not everybody, but many people who do it, come out saying never again, but it was a very important experience to have had.

*Q: Were you in the other building?*

COOK: Yes, I was over on Pennsylvania Avenue at that time. In that capacity, I traveled again to Africa and visited a lot of places that I hadn't [seen]. When I came home from Senegal, I'd only been to Senegal, the Gambia, and Kenya, so that's all I'd seen when I took that job. So it enabled me really to get to know Africa and to develop my interest in it, and to pursue it [while] actually back here, which I'd never done before. From there, I received one of those university award grants and went to Harvard.

*Q: Aha. There we are. Yes, MPA.*

COOK: Yes. I went to Harvard on a USIA grant. Again, indulged my growing interest in Africa. What I opted to do, once I arrived at Harvard, was to take courses which represented more general foreign policy issues, but to write my theses, of which I wrote about seven while I was there, on African topics. For example, I would study with Stanley Hoffman on a topic that he was teaching that year on foreign policy decision-making, but my thesis was on the Horn of Africa. I purposely chose at Harvard to write on areas of Africa I knew nothing about, so that I could learn about them intellectually.

*Q: Smart girl.*

COOK: I took a course a MIT and wrote on southern Africa where I'd never been, except on a quick personnel trip. So I filled in the gaps of my knowledge of Africa that year at Harvard by the papers that I wrote. While I was at Harvard, the Senegal connection then came back. I remember when it was time for graduation - it was a one year master's program so I did a lot of work - I remember turning in my last theses - and they were seventy or eighty page papers, they were long papers - and then grabbing a plane and running to New York, to meet President Senghor, to escort him on yet another trip

through the States. Then I flew back to Harvard to graduate. Then I flew to Washington to start my new job.

*Q: When did you squeeze in the course at MIT? [laughter]*

COOK: It was while I was at Harvard. You could take courses at any school in the Boston area if you were enrolled at Harvard. They had the best person on southern Africa, so I went there to do southern Africa. Harvard, in fact, is quite, unless it's changed, still is very weak on Africa. They have the best foreign policy professors, probably, in the country, but in terms of Africa specialists I didn't do a single Africa course at Harvard.

*Q: Southern Africa as opposed to South Africa?*

COOK: Southern, that's right. Then while I was at Harvard, Dick Moose recruited me to come to the State Department, and I've never been back to USIA - Given the travails I mentioned to you earlier about various State requests for me to come work for State, and USIA turned them down - I was surprised, frankly, that this raid was successful, but it was. He asked me to be office director for AF/P, which is the public affairs office, and which was an important office, I think, during the Carter administration, because of the very public nature of the African diplomacy, and the attempts by the very high level - including Secretary Vance - both to educate the American public on what our real goals were in Africa, and to get moving on policy there. I think all of us felt US policy had been rather quiescent in the years since African independence. So that was a very *movementé* period for both the United States, and for Africa, and for those of us who were working on it.

*Q: Did you want to come over to the State Department because you felt there were more opportunities for your areas of interest, than if you stayed at USIA?*

COOK: I basically became much more interested in the politics, and the policy, and the economics than, I did in the other aspects. I never knew that I would be an ambassador, but I decided I would like to spend the last part of my career doing the things that State Department officers do overseas, rather than being a public affairs officer. I never aspired one day to be a public affairs officer. I enjoyed cultural affairs, because it let me get into the politics. It really became the focus of my interest.

*Q: You had such an interest in politics...*

COOK: From the beginning, yes.

*Q: From the beginning.*

COOK: It really let me do what I wanted to do with the rest of my career. I also was a great admirer of Dick Moose. I met him when he was undersecretary for management at a dinner party at the home of a mutual friend, who is now a congressman. I admired

somebody who cared a lot about Africa. He did a remarkable thing, if you remember, during that administration. He was undersecretary of management and moved to being assistant secretary for Africa. It was his choice to do that. I decided that somebody who cared that much about a continent, about which I cared a great deal by now, was somebody that I would like to work with.

*Q: That was his choice? You see, that's not what I heard, so I'm very interested in your telling me that.*

COOK: I'm told it was his choice.

*Q: Yes, well you would know.*

COOK: He came with a great deal of pride. There was never any sense that he was being demoted. A great deal of pride and challenge.

*Q: He was in the area he wanted to be in.*

COOK: Yes. I remember the night - this is sort of off the subject, but it gets us back to Senghor - the night that he was sworn in. He and Maggie called me. He's a great lover of poetry.

*Q: Dick Moose is?*

COOK: Yes, and Maggie is, too. What they really wanted was to do African poetry for the swearing-in. I spent hours the night before he was sworn in, trying to find appropriate verses for them to use and I think they eventually did use some. They both are great lovers - I think they both even write some poetry - great lovers of African culture. We had to find the right excerpt et cetera.

*Q: Very good. You were an FIO, information officer, now how does that work? Do you just suddenly become a FO?*

COOK: No, it's very complex. There's been a lot of interest in transferring over to the State Department by various USIO officers, particularly in recent years. When it is done, it must be done based on "designation of need" by the State Department, for the skills of a particular officer. It is harder now to do than when I did it, but I think it was basically done at the time because the need was manifest in the fact that I was occupying a State Department job. I applied to transfer a couple of times, basically, and that need couldn't be certified. Then the second year I was in AF/P it was, and so I had the curious experience of going through a background security investigation. It's like you're coming in off the street when you transfer. Background security investigation, and I had to go to Rosslyn and swear my allegiance, again, in the personnel office over there in the same month that I was going up for my hearings as ambassador. So it was a very curious thing. But one was not connected at all to the other. The personnel process of transferring happened completely independently.

*Q: But they had to do all the background clearance and everything? Why, because you have access to more...*

COOK: No, I think in general, agencies, in spite of how we try to make uniform regulations, don't accept the investigations of other agencies.

*Q: So then your designation was changed and you became an FO, they call it now. They used to say FSO now it's FO. Okay. Well, you were going along. You finished this grant, Dick Moose recruited you. And for how long were you the office director for AF/P?*

COOK: For two years. I was there from '78 to '80 and then went out to Burundi in 1980.

*Q: All right. Now let's start. This is the meat of the interview, your becoming an ambassador. Can you tell me the first time you heard you were being considered?*

COOK: (Laughter) As so often happens in this leaky ship of State in which we sail, I had first had it hinted to me by someone who shared the motor pool with one of Dick's deputy assistant secretaries in AF. I was incredulous, because it hadn't occurred to me that they were even considering me for any assignment like that. I had already basically secured an ongoing assignment in EUR. So I was very surprised. I was doubly surprised at the selection of the country, because for all of my travels in AF, and there had been really a great number of them in the AF/P job - including being invited by Dick Moose to travel with Muhammad Ali when he went to Africa, and advancing Miss Lillian's trip to Africa, and various trips with Andy Young and Dick Moose - I had seen by that point, or spent some considerable amount of time in over 30 African countries. Needless to say, I'd never been anywhere near Burundi, and was as surprised by the job, as I was by the country. It was the first I'd heard about it. Then Dick called me up very quickly. I think he'd gotten at least an initial reading from what was then the Christopher committee, which is now the Whitehead committee [A committee chaired by the deputy secretary of state and which bears the undersecretary's name in personnel circles.].

*Q: It's now called the what?*

COOK: It's now the Whitehead committee, which decides on ambassadors. I think he'd gotten at least an initial reading through personnel, or through that committee, that my nomination would be favorably received. He didn't have any guarantees, but he wanted to propose it, then he called me up and told me about the job. I was flabbergasted. And what he hoped to do with it. It seems to me in less than 48 hours he called me back and told me that it had been approved by the Christopher committee. So I was just getting used to the idea, when I was sort of on my way.

*Q: Can we just go back a little tiny bit? You mentioned the Mohammed Ali visit. Dick told me about that and how beautifully you handled yourself on it. Could we hear a little bit about that trip, because he's such a colorful character.*

COOK: It was one of the most interesting things I've ever done, and one of the least expected. The reason for the visit, which you have to understand, to understand the problems that we had on it, was that, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, the White House decided that it wanted to take various retaliatory measures, very appropriately so, I think. The thing that was coming up instantly, that would send an important message to the Soviet people, would be a boycott of their [Moscow] Olympics. The African states are always very important in that, and you always had to remember when you talk about Africa, you're talking about one-third of the nations in the world - in terms of General Assembly votes - so it's a very big bloc. Africans for all of their lack of unity on some political things, tend to follow important leaders on these kinds of issues, so it was felt that if we approached them and attempted to win their support for this Olympic boycott it would be important in the president's effort. So I was sitting in a staff. meeting in AF one Thursday or Friday morning in February, and I was told in that staff meeting - I had not participated in the decision of sending Mohammed Ali around the continent - that I was to be on the plane that night at Andrews. That's how I ended up going on the trip!

There was a great deal of political concern once it had been decided to go ahead with it. I frankly don't know who the father of the idea was. I don't think it was in the State Department, but it was one that was accepted. There was then concern...

*Q: Didn't he offer to go to Africa? Didn't Mohammed Ali...*

COOK: He was already overseas. He had to be called and asked if he would even do this. It was proposed (and accepted) by the White House, so it was very important, I think, that the assistant secretary have people on board who could try to keep this most unusual enterprise on track. [laughter] Four of us were sent from AF, [including] Ambassador Lannon Walker, who is now in Senegal, Don Bandler who is now in Paris and worked in AF/I at the time, and then a very remarkable black FSO named Brian Salter. He is a person who has been written up in the State Department Newsletter. I think you might recall him. He's currently at Harvard on his university year, but he played for the Redskins and came in on a special program into the State Department. His first assignment, I believe, was as Dick Moose's staff aide. He turned out to be the secret weapon in an incredibly important play on this, as Dick instinctively and correctly knew he would be. There were other officers, by the way, from USIA, and one from the White House on the trip

*Q: You were the only woman on this junket?*

COOK: Yes. The trip got off to a difficult start. We walked into Ali's hotel in New Delhi - he was in New Delhi at the time, where he'd been phoned (by the White House)and he said he would go on this trip. - We walked into the hotel to pick him up and two things had already happened by the time we got there, (after flying all night). One is that the trip had been announced by the White House, and the Soviet ambassador had already had a long session with Ali, privately in his hotel room, trying to talk him out of the trip. The other thing that happened was when we walked in - we thought his wife was going with

him on the trip - but they were having a terrible and very loud argument, as we were sitting in the outer room. It became very apparent as we were leaving - we came to pick him up to go to the airport - that she was not going on the trip. He took only a very nice man, who's an assistant of his, so there were just two of them from Ali's side, if you will, on the whole trip. What we basically had was the flight from New Delhi to Dar es Salaam to try to bring him fully up to speed on African politics, the diplomacy involved, and the issue, and what we were going to be trying to do in the selection of countries that we were going to. Tanzania is a very important African regional leader. When we got there - we had a lot of Soviet sabotage attempts throughout the whole trip and very bad...

*Q: Now what kind of sabotage? Propaganda?*

COOK: Yes, in Dar es Salaam there are a group of long-term American black exiles there, who went there in the early days of *ujamaa* [Ujamaa - a social philosophy espoused by President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania which called for the gradual socialization of agrarian labor by relocating scattered peasant households into self-help villages supported by government social services.] and had stayed on. Several of them had since come home, and what you have now is a difficult group, who are basically in our (consular) "lookout books" for narcotics violations. They got to Ali and had a private session with him and basically asked him to denounce the United States government, hold a press conference there and cancel his trip. The fine hand of you-know-who was visible in that. When we got to Nigeria, we had a bought-and-paid-for Soviet demonstration, including surrounding the embassy the day we arrived with the Soviet ambassador, sitting in front, in his car, watching it. Then by the time we got to Dakar - I'm skipping a whole lot - by the time we got to Dakar, we had the Tass correspondent, get up in a press conference, and again attempt to get Ali to denounce the United States, and to say that he was being used by the Carter administration against the interests of his background as an African! At that point Ali had had it! In Dar [es Salaam] we almost lost him. He was really very confused by all this. We hadn't had time to brief him. By the time we got to Dakar, he understood what the Soviets had been doing to him. It happened so often and it was so crude - as the Soviets can be on stuff like this - that he stood up in Dakar and told off the Tass correspondent, in a way that only Mohammed Ali could do it! What he thought about their women, their cars, and everything else in the Soviet Union - he'd been there - to the point where the man sat down red-faced and wished he'd never asked a question. Then Ali did something absolutely remarkable, that we did not know about beforehand. (We got a lot of bad press on this trip, but none of them recorded this event, and it was extremely disappointing to put it mildly.) Ali then got out a small tape recorder, that he carried in his brief case, and played for the press conference, a secret tape recording he had made, in New Delhi, of the Soviet ambassador –pleading with him, giving him all the reasons why he shouldn't go on this trip. It was the highest form of sort of victorious theater, if you will - although the press didn't cover it. I have enormous respect for his intelligence as a result of this trip. I'd never seen a boxing match in my life before I started on it, certainly didn't know him, but by the time we got to Dakar there was no doubt in my mind he's the most loved and best known person on the entire continent. I think we were very badly served by the kind of press coverage we had on this trip, and I think his trip did make a difference. It was just "a magical mystery" tour for me to even

participate in something like this, but we had a very difficult time with it politically. He and President Senghor even exchanged poetry and recited their poems to each other in a private meeting at Senghor's beach house in Senegal. An amazing moment. We went to Tanzania, Kenya, Liberia just before the coup, a week or two before the coup, and Senegal.

*Q: Is Ali a poet, too?*

COOK: Of course. Ali is very famous for his poetry.

*Q: But it's sort of doggerel.*

COOK: It would be called doggerel by everybody else, but Ali calls it poetry.

*Q: All right. I thought you were going to tell me something I didn't know. [Laughter] His poetry is quite funny.*

COOK: But the hours he put on this trip, and the conversations he had, and the really crude attempts that were made to turn him around. You sort of could sit on the plane, and say if they're fighting it this hard, we must be doing something right. They really made every attempt. It was clear that it was a full Soviet effort in Africa to turn him around, even all the way up to the last stop. That was what we were concerned about. As much as we could brief him, [and] the only time we could brief him was during the flights - because when he hit the ground, you couldn't get near him! Because his schedule was so hectic and he was up half the night talking to fans in most places, he would tend to sleep on the plane, so we had a very difficult time. He was unpredictable, what he would say to the press. By the end of it I think he felt very, very good about it, and he reported straight to the president, as you know.

The first place we got off the plane was Dar es Salaam and there even though the president refused to see him, (because he refused to participate in this boycott), the word had gotten out that Ali was coming, and his fans broke down the fence at the airport. I'd never been around anything like this, nor expected ever to be in it. It was frightening. I... got lost in the crowd. And even though we'd only spent that time [together] coming from Delhi, it was really very touching what happened. He turned around and left all these people, and came back to the plane and got me. Because I was about to be trampled, frankly. He put his arms protective around me and walked into the press conference. I was very touched. I was overwhelmed by it.

Then something else very funny happened that night. I could go on for hours and so could Lannon with stories on this trip. But something very funny happened - if you know Ali's reputation - that night. TANU was then the official political party of Tanzania, which was the Tanganyika African National Union. The name's since been changed. We went to a TANU party reception for Ali that night offered by the minister of sports. All of the young demoiselles of Tanzania who could beg, borrow, or steal an invitation were there. They did a TANU party dance, which is kind of like a long mamba line, which he

was able to do. Then the real dancing started and he came up and he put his arms around me, again! I said, "Yes, can I help you, Ali?" He whispered, "Help me, I don't know how to dance and I don't want to embarrass them." So Ali and I pretended to dance for the first dance. After that he basically just joked around and signed autographs so that he didn't have to show that he didn't know how to dance. But if you consider his reputation "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee," fast on the feet, and all the rhythm, and so forth, it's incredible that he doesn't know how to dance!

*Q: Yes, that is strange.*

COOK: I have to run off in ten minutes, I could tell you war stories forever, but the AF/P job was...

*Q: How about your trip with...*

COOK: Andy and Dick [Andrew Young, then US Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Richard Moose, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs.]?

*Q: Yes.*

COOK: It was equally incredible. I went out to Khartoum to a conference with both of them. An African-American Institute Conference, and Andy decided to go on down, to what he used to call, "ride the front line," which is go down and talk to the front line in Rhodesia's struggle for independence, see those heads of state, the presidents. This is when we were very deeply involved in Rhodesian independence talks and were considering what to do to impact apartheid in South Africa. Some of the sanctions now being discussed we discussed back then. Dick was sent with him, by Mr. Vance, and I was the only bureau person with Dick at the conference. He basically needed somebody to go and take notes and report on the sessions. So I went along kind of as a staff aide, horse holder, spear carrier, and again it was one of the most interesting trips I've ever [been on]. We went incredible places. We flew into Botswana. It was the first senior level visit ever to Botswana. We couldn't take the president's plane in there, so we had to change planes in South Africa, and we basically flew through the war zone in a leased South African civilian marked plane, which scared me to death. I don't like to fly in spite of all the flying I've done. That day going to Botswana I think was one of the most memorable days I've spent in AF, because we were on this plane that was unmarked, flying through a "liberation" war zone with South African markings on it. No one knew who was in it. It just had South African markings, the last thing you wanted to be flying over Rhodesia in.

*Q: Good heavens, yes.*

COOK: Then we got in a terrible storm. It was a tiny, tiny plane. I remember the VOA correspondent, who accompanied us, had to sit on the toilet on the plane, that's how small it was! My knuckles just went white. You know what Andy did? We were facing each other too. It was like a barracks arrangement. He was sitting right here and he took my

hands and started singing a hymn to me. All the way down. [laughter]

*Q: Did he really?*

COOK: Yes, he soloed all the way in to Gaborone. It wasn't 'Nearer My God To Thee.' I forget what it was, but it was absolutely one of the most sensitive and touching things anybody could have done for me.
*Q: Now that wouldn't happen to a man, if you'd been a man, Frances.*

COOK: Then we went straight from the airport to the cathedral. This is Sunday morning in Gaborone, and Andy gave the sermon. My mother still has the tape. It is one of the most remarkable speeches - he did no preparation, I can tell you, I was with him on the whole trip - on brotherhood and what can be the potential for southern Africa if these things can come together, that I've ever heard in my life. The Botswana radio rebroadcast it practically hourly into South Africa for the entire weekend. It was an incredibly moving experience that went from being scared to death, and having a private hymn, to that. [laughter] It was just an incredible day. The whole time I worked for Dick Moose I kept having these unbelievable experiences.

*Q: He was dealing with very magnetic, fascinating people.*

COOK: Yes, absolutely. I'll be eternally grateful for the opportunity he gave me. I'd never have met some of these chiefs of state that we met with. We met guerrilla leaders. I'd never have met guerrilla leaders, Joshua Nkomo [Joshua Nkomo, founder of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU).]... I was taking notes and doing the whole thing.

*Q: Why did he send you along on this?*

COOK: He was going and he needed a staffer. Andy had staff with him and the assistant secretary really can't travel without staff. It's one thing to use the embassy, it's another if you're involved in one specific issue, and you keep getting incoming and outgoing traffic and so forth.

*Q: I see.*

COOK: They basically just wanted some people to do some of the reporting as well. So I was doing the reporting, arrangements, handling press, whatever they needed me to do. There was Andy and one staffer. This plus his two bodyguards (one was white, one was black - State Department DS agents. We called them" salt and pepper!") and me, and the VOA correspondent. That was the entire group and that was crowded on that little plane, as I mentioned to you.

*Q: White knuckles department.*

COOK: Yes.

*Q: With South African markings on the plane.*

COOK: Flying through...

[MARCH 13, 1987]

I think one of the most, I guess, touching experiences I had in all my years of dealing with Africa was on that trip with him that was through the front line states. When we finished visiting Mozambique where we went to see the ZANU leaders who were leading the liberation struggle for Zimbabwe, and then we wanted to go to Botswana. The airport in Botswana wouldn't take the C-141 that we were using, so we had to go to Johannesburg and change and get in a very small plane to go into Botswana, which we did. We left the C-141 in Jo'burg. We were so crowded that the VOA correspondent had to sit on the loo [bathroom] in the plane. We were like this. I don't like to fly. I'm scared of flying basically, but you have to in this business, so I do it. So we got in this little plane with South African markings on it, flying around southern Africa, which is not a safe place to be flying in a South African plane. Then we got in a storm and my knuckles went white. Andy looked at me and he saw what was happening, and he just started singing a hymn to me on the plane to calm me down and he sang it until we got in the Gaborone airport. I was really very touched by it, it was very sweet. I don't remember what song it was. Then we went on. I think I told you this. We went on and he preached. We went straight to the cathedral. It was a Sunday morning and he preached at the cathedral that day.

*Q: He showed no fear at all?*

COOK: None, none. And he did no preparation for one of the most remarkable sermons I've ever heard in my life. I was on the plane with him. He carries a little Bible always, so he had a couple of verses he read. But that was his entire preparation for the sermon. It was taped and it was rebroadcast all over southern Africa for weeks. I have it at home. I replay it every so often.

*Q: Well, he seems to be quite an inspiring person. Anything else that you can recall that you'd like to share?*

COOK: On that particular trip?

*Q: Or any other business that you had with Andrew Young.*

COOK: Well, I went on several trips with him. One I just told someone about today. One of the things we did was travel domestically as well, because my job at that time was trying to both expand American understanding of Africa and help people to understand what America's stake was there. Then, of course, trying to get support for the policy. One of the series of regional conferences that were held was in Houston, arranged by the African-American Institute. They decided to have one in Texas. It was held at some club

outside of town. We went into town for one event.

Now the background of this is that Joshua Nkomo was already there, came to attend the conference. He was described in the Texas press as a guerrilla leader from southern Africa, so had people very worried about what this person... Joshua Nkomo was like everybody's grandfather. He weighed about 300 pounds. He speaks so softly. One time I was a note taker at a meeting for him, and it was at a meal and I basically had to stop eating because I couldn't hear what he was saying, he was so soft-spoken. That dissipated once we got there. But I was told that the people in Texas basically thought Andy Young was a Communist and were just appalled that he was coming down there. So they put him right into the center of the power elite of that city by scheduling a speech for him, at lunch time, at the Houston Chamber of Commerce. I went to that and anybody who's ever heard Andy Young speak on Africa knew the speech, and knew that's what he felt very deeply. He is not a barnburner, he does not preach revolution. What he preaches is increased trade, and very much a chamber of commerce kind of approach to strengthening ties among people, and raising the general level of exchanges and so forth. We walked into this room, which was packed, it was sold out, the Chamber of Commerce luncheon. The hostility was just visible in the room when we walked in. At the end of his speech he got a five minute standing ovation. It was really just remarkable. It was very heartfelt, I thought, sitting there watching it. It was just fascinating to watch him turn that hostility into... He did not give that speech because that's what he thought they wanted to hear. I've heard him give the same speech to rooms with just Africans in it. I've heard him give the same speech in rooms with very liberal Americans in it who want to hear the liberation struggle preached, and he talks about trade, economics. He understands.

*Q: That must have been quite something. One thing I did not get clear was why Dick Moose - well, I can understand why, but I should say <u>how</u> did he know you well enough to want to recruit you when you were up at Harvard?*

COOK: We met at the home of some mutual friends. He and Maggie were there for dinner before I went to Harvard. This friend is now a congressman from New Mexico [Bill Richardson, later secretary of energy], and he is the cousin of my college roommate. They're very close friends of mine and they were friends of Dick and Maggie's. Dante Fascell was there the same night, who's now chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee you know. I first worked in Dante's campaigns when I was 13 and he knows me very, very well, too. I guess maybe that influenced Dick too. He thought if he could get somebody in that the chairman was close to that that would help him. It wasn't set up for that purpose. Dick was then in M [M - Office of the Under Secretary for Management] with no intention of going to AF. I was introduced to him as somebody who knew and loved Africa. I think he just thought of me when the AF/P job came up.

*Q: And it worked. At what point exactly did you transfer over to State? Was that in 1978, Frances?*

COOK: No, I came to work at State when I came back from Harvard, in fact even before as I told you, I did the Senghor escort job. I started working at State in the summer of '78.

My official transfer came through in the summer of '80, the same summer I was made an ambassador.

*Q: Oh, okay.*

COOK: But they were on two separate tracks and the two separate offices of personnel didn't know what both were doing. I'm still listed on lots of lists as USIA.

*Q: Yes, you are considered to be one, according to some of the officers here, and of course you're not. Now you said that you had heard through the bureau motor pool that you were going to be made ambassador. You said that some friends who were driving with you...*

COOK: No, they were driving with people and they told me it was discussed in the motor pool.

*Q: It was discussed in the motor pool and you didn't know about it. When did you hear, and how did you hear?*

COOK: Moose called me up to his office one evening and asked me straight out if I would go to Burundi. By then I'd heard rumors, and I thought people were teasing me because I was planning on leaving AF, and going to work in New York [UN]. Maybe he can remember how I reacted. I just remember being flabbergasted - because that made it quite official. It seems to me that it happened in the course of just two or three days, because he wanted to ask my permission before he gave my name to the Whitehead committee. It seems to me within 48 hours he called me back and told me that I'd been approved by the Whitehead committee. It happened so fast that I was really unprepared for it. I didn't tell my parents because I'd really never thought that I would be an ambassador. It never dawned on me that I would ever be an ambassador.

*Q: At least not then.*

COOK: Not that early. So I didn't tell my parents because, first of all I knew they wouldn't know where Burundi was. I would have spent a long time on the phone with them. [laughter] It seems to me that this was some time in the early spring because I was going home for Easter in a few weeks and I just waited until I got home. I got home on a late evening flight. We lived 30 miles from Miami so I think we were in the house after midnight. I couldn't wait one second longer and I told them about one o'clock in the morning.

*Q: They were absolutely flabbergasted.*

COOK: Absolutely flabbergasted. My father reacted wonderfully. He said, "I always knew this would happen." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "But I didn't think it would happen this early." He was very excited.

*Q: It is, of course, extremely unusual. You are far and away the youngest of the career women. So then after that you got on the merry-go round of the senate hearings and the so forth. Can you recall anything about the senate hearings?*

COOK: I was describing it to somebody quite recently who said they would like to do some testimony. I said the only thing I can compare it with in terms of how I reacted to it was when I used to do a lot of theater in high school. I did a lot of acting. I don't mean that it was artificial or contrived, I meant what my emotional reaction to it was. I was so nervous, scared to death, before I got to that table. I didn't think I could even walk to the front of the room. Then minute I started talking I just loved it and enjoyed myself. I felt I did the same thing in the theater. I used to think I was going- (end of tape)

I'd frankly never seen a confirmation hearing before I went to my own. There were so many people. It was the last day before a recess. I was basically saved by a senate staffer, whom I knew but didn't know well, because I think they were about to recess for a long recess and they'd gone through a series of people. Herb Okun [Foreign Service Officer, Ambassador to East Germany, 8/80 to 1/83.] was up that day for East Germany. Frank McNeil [Francis J. McNeil, Foreign Service Officer, Ambassador to Costa Rica, 7/80 to 6/83.] was up for Costa Rica. They were coming to the end of the day and they were getting ready to go to some votes on the senate floor, and she talked to [Senator] Tsongas who was presiding that day.

*Q: Tsongas?*

COOK: Yes. There were three of us brought to the table at once, which is very unusual, but if she hadn't done that, we wouldn't have been confirmed before the big recess.

*Q: She squeezed you in?*

COOK: Yes. So some of the questions were to all three of us and some were specifically to me. I remember I was required to defend our policy in southern Africa. I was asked a little bit about Burundi. Then Tsongas was very famous to all of us who were going through hearings, at that time, because he required that you speak a vernacular language to be confirmed, or that you undertook, under oath, to study one. So he asked each of us what we would do. I knew as much as one can cram into one's head on a country one has never been to, but I still didn't know a lot about Burundi. But I did know that the language was absolutely impossible. It's considered by linguists harder than Japanese - it's a tonal language. That's the national language, Kirundi - so I didn't really want to promise.

*Q: It's called Kirundi?*

COOK: Kirundi, yes. I didn't want to promise that I would learn that because I knew I couldn't. But I knew that the language of the cities, the language of the traders in east Africa is Swahili, so I told him that I would study Swahili when I got there, and I hoped he could come visit me and I would be able to greet him in another language. I did follow

through on my promise as we all did. And I studied Swahili when I was in Burundi. I never became that proficient at it, but I did study it and I'm an absolute believer in his view. I don't think he thought he was going to create linguists out of this insistence when he was on that committee, but I think what he was trying to get at, and he was right, was that by studying a language other than a European language, if you're in the third world, you get into the culture and understand the mentality better. And I thought the same thing when I was going to Egypt. I only had, I think, three months of Arabic and you can't learn Arabic in three months, but I learned a lot about the culture and the traditions and what to expect. In the Arabic FSI [classes], if you're going to Egypt, you're taught by Egyptian teachers. They teach five different kinds of Arabic at FSI, which is superb. And you really learn a lot about the culture by being in it. I don't think it's a misuse at all, on the contrary, of language funds. I think it's a superb use. It depends on how much you really have time, what your personal interest is. Learning language - you just don't learn them that easily, you have to work at it, so it really depends on your personal interest and the amount of time. You can always make time for it if you just do. But you do get the culture whether or not you ever make time for the language. You get that, at least that little window into the culture by learning the language. And that's what I think he was trying to do. It came out of his Peace Corps experience in Ethiopia. That's why he did it.

*Q: I see. You had special preparations for the Senate hearing. I suppose they were talking to people on the desk and going around town?*

COOK: That was the standard round of consultations that you normally do with agencies and everything else. I remember I took notes on all of these meetings. I think I had them for several weeks and then I spent the weekend before my hearing... Like so many it was put off two or three times. You get to a pitch and then it's canceled. My hearing was supposed to be on a Monday, I remember, initially, and I think I finally went up on a Wednesday or a Thursday. But that entire weekend I remember sitting at my dining room table with all my notebooks spread out, my books, my maps. It basically was like being back in college, because it's a curious part of this whole procedure that you're really quizzed on your country before you ever go to it. When you come back, this is career or any political appointee ambassador, and presumably you're a bit of an expert, at least, if not a very good one, on that country, nobody in the foreign relations committee is interested in having any hearings or anything. And no interest in the building [State Department], either.

*Q: Isn't that strange?*

COOK: Not even in the building. It seems to me that the agency and INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research in the Department of State.] should be interested in having sessions with you. Maybe they do for a few, but mostly not. It should be kind of SOP, it seems to me. I don't know quite why the building has never done that unless it's “the king is dead, long live the king.” They're not interested in hearing from an outgoing ambassador, but you do have a great deal of knowledge at that point. Because of the unwritten code of ambassadors you don't get reinvolved in the country you just left and it's not well seen. Maybe that's why they don't do it, but they're really just throwing away

a lot of knowledge, I think.

*Q: I think, Frances, that is the gap that FSI [Foreign Service Institute, the Department of State's training branch.] is trying to fill with these taped interviews. Beginning with the women, which I'm doing. They plan to do it for everybody, you know. A farewell interview, so to speak.*

COOK: They need to do that. The other thing they ought to think about, if they don't want the outgoing ambassador to get involved in the program of the new ambassador, they should do something. I've seen that they've just announced one. They're having one today for a current ambassador to Haiti and it's called a mid-tour - he's not really mid-tour - a mid-tour assessment. They should do it at some point because you've got all that knowledge of the country there and it's just not being taken advantage of institutionally by any of the agencies.

*Q: As you say, you would think INR would certainly want it.*

COOK: Yes. The other thing about that hearing, which I guess happens to every ambassador and I think it was particularly true of Burundi (we know historical cases where people in fact have had agrément withdrawn based on something they said in the hearings), is that I was just astounded when I got to Burundi that everybody in that government, not just the president, knew everything that was said in that hearing. They knew everything Moose said in his speech (at my swearing). They knew everything I said in my speech at the swearing in. They watch it like this.

*Q: Sure they do. Did their ambassador come to your senate hearing?*

COOK: No, he didn't.

*Q: Sometimes they do. You didn't get any of these sexist questions then, at all, because by your generation it was an accepted thing that women will be approved.*

COOK: I got them when I came in (to the Foreign Service). My security interview had plenty of them in it. I did not get any up there and I would have been astounded if Tsongas, particularly, had had any. The only time my heart really skipped a beat - when I was sitting at the table was, I guess, it was when I was sitting in the audience before I went to the table - Senator Helms walked into the room. If you've been involved in African affairs, you know that he and his staff members have people they don't like and do like, and policies they do like and don't like, and they very much apply it when it comes to these hearings.

*Q: I know.*

COOK: I didn't know of any negative attitudes about me in his office, but you just never know. That made me very nervous. He actually came in to question somebody in a very hostile manner who had been nominated to be assistant administrator of AID for Latin

America, who was also up that day.

*Q: But he did not question you?*

COOK: It was just Tsongas in the chair when I was...

*Q: Just Tsongas. Was there more than one senator there that day?*

COOK: People wandered in and out, various parts, but for my part of the hearing it was just Tsongas, which was appropriate. He was chairman of the Africa sub committee.

*Q: I see, Tsongas was chairman of the Africa sub committee. I didn't realize that. I gather then, that the pieces all finally came together and you had a swearing-in. Now could you tell a little bit about that? Was it the usual one up on the eighth floor?*

COOK: It was the usual one. People have told me it was the largest one they've ever been to, and I didn't intend for it to be. People tell me there were over 400 people there. I don't really recall inviting that many people.

*Q: People walk into those things.*

COOK: It's one of those moments where you're absolutely high and you frankly don't know how many people are there. There was a great turnout, I must say, from both outside the government and from inside the building. I didn't issue any "y'all come" invitations. I called people I specifically wanted to come and so did my secretary. I think some other people came along. When I got to Burundi I had to answer at least three letters from people who weren't invited and had wanted to be. It's very hard to get...

*Q: Especially when you're under such stress.*

COOK: And so much is going on. You're dealing with movers, you're dealing with everything all at once. It was the standard big Benjamin Franklin room. I felt that it had been nerve making enough to go through the hearings. I would have been delighted to have a private swearing-in. I didn't even consider the possibility because I felt that this is one thing that - I don't know if other people have told you this - I was not doing that for Frances, I was doing that for Mom and Dad. I wouldn't have considered doing anything else. It was the only time before or since, I think, since I was a very young child, that our whole family was together, aunts and uncles, most of whom had never been to Washington, came. I think practically everybody in the family was there standing in the front row. They all came together. It was really very touching. Quite a few of them have died since and that was only '80. When we get together now, even when we have very sad occasions, we all recall that event as the last time the whole family came together.

*Q: It was a happy time. And were plenty of photographs taken so that you have...*

COOK: Plenty of photographs were taken. My father was incredibly proud and was

carrying my luggage all over the place during that period. I did not find out until I got to Burundi that he had to have an operation, and refused to consider having it for fear of missing the swearing-in, and refused to let me know about it for fear that I would be worried about him, and stood on a receiving line for two hours with that. There are a couple of pictures where he's looking at the ceiling and I didn't know what it was all about until I got a letter after the operation in Burundi.

*Q: My word. Well, it must have been a tremendous thing for the whole family.*

COOK: It was. I think maybe I was the first person that Dick Moose had sworn in.

*Q: That's what I wanted to ask.*

COOK: It wouldn't have dawned on me to have somebody on the seventh floor that I didn't know very well.

*Q: He swore you in?*

COOK: He presided over the most important moment in my life. It had to be somebody I knew and respected. A lot of people want to have the undersecretary or the secretary. I have a great deal of respect for all them, but they haven't played that major a role in my own development, and in getting me there, and I thought it was one way to honor Dick. There's not much you can do to honor somebody who's your boss.

*Q: Who's the assistant secretary.*

COOK: After having written I kidded him. I wrote so many speeches for him when I was in AF I said, "This is one I'm not going to do." I checked around afterwards. I didn't need to. I checked around jokingly, because I knew his own style. I knew it was pure Moose. He wrote it himself. I cannot believe that anybody ghosted it. Everybody said, “No, no, they didn't do it.” I think it's really true. Dick did write it himself.

*Q: I'm sure he did.*

COOK: It could only have been written by somebody who knew me extremely well.

*Q: Did you introduce your family to the people?*

COOK: Yes, I did quickly in the speech. You go to so many of these, and I think Elinor Constable did a very good job recently.

*Q: Yes, I was there.*

COOK: Oh, were you? She was listing all the things she didn't want to do because she’s been to so many. I thought hers was absolutely delightful. But there are three things that you have to do in any one of those and we all follow the formula to a greater or lesser

extent. So I did the three things that she mentioned in her swearing-in. It's just how you put it together. I was so busy I didn't have much time to spend on the speech, so it wasn't something I probably would have done if I could have given more thought to it. It certainly wasn't extemporaneous. I was just too nervous. I read it.

*Q: You read from cards.*

COOK: I absolutely read it. We had a podium so I read from that.

*Q: Did you have it typed out or did you...*

COOK: No, I typed it.

*Q: Just refresh my memory, what are the three things again you have to thank?*

COOK: You talk about the Foreign Service, you talk about your family, and you talk about the country you're going to in some particular combination. Some people spend the whole time talking about their family, and barely mention the other two. Some people spend the whole time talking about the country they're going to. Some people, I understand, recently have been spending most of their speech talking about the Foreign Service and what's happening to it and never mentioning the other two. It's some kind of combination. I've been to swearings-in where it's gotten so silly in the general family category where you're thanking people who made you what you are today. I went to one, and it was somebody I know quite well, and his list of thank-yous he literally thanked his dentist. [laughter] You can carry it to an nth degree. So you kind of have to decide what the balance is.

You realize once you start hearing things coming... It's very exciting when you start seeing cables come out of the country that you're going to that mention your name, that you are a personage there even though you haven't yet arrived. It's a little newspaper article or something in the local press saying you're coming and that as much as anything else makes you realize you are now speaking for the United States. I think the thing that you really want to concentrate on in the speech is the country you're going to, because you are sending a message right there. You're sort of laying the groundwork for the kind of tour you are going to have. So that's what I concentrated on, really, the most in my speech.

*Q: Did you write it all yourself?*

COOK: Yes. The only other part of that day is, I took all the family out to dinner that night in Georgetown. That was really all the time we had together. I had this nice caterer in town make some little sandwiches and so forth. They don't seem to do that much any more.

*Q: No, they don't. They just seem to have champagne.*

COOK: I had champagne.

*Q: And you had sandwiches for all those people?*

COOK: Just little hors d'oeuvres and nuts and stuff like that.

*Q: It must have cost you a bomb.*

COOK: It wasn't that much. It wasn't that bad. I'm trying to think of the name, Ridgewell's.

*Q: Oh, yes. They give you a list of caterers, don't they, and you pick the one you want?*

COOK: No. the fascinating thing, this was a whole new world for me. I had no idea how many were going to be there and certainly not that many so I'd called the caterers and when I was asking for bids I would start explaining what the ceremony was, and they'd done it so many times. They said, "Oh, yes, we know the kitchen manager and we go through this door." I just realized there was a whole world operating here that was completely beyond my knowledge and it made it really awfully easy.

*Q: I thought that Protocol gave you a list of people and you could pick.*

COOK: I thought, we all used to think when we were young officers, that the State Department provided that reception for you.

*Q: That would be the day.*

COOK: That's one of the great things you learn. If I ever do it again, if I'm ever lucky enough to get ambassador again, I will have a private ceremony. I've done the one thing you need to do for your family.

*Q: Who held the Bible?*

COOK: My mother and my father. My mother held it open to a special verse that she wanted me to tell you about. I will find it out from her and give it to you. But she didn't tell me about it until after the ceremony and she chose it. She evidently studied the Bible a long time in Florida before she came up and specifically selected a verse and she held it open and put my hand on that verse. And she only told me about it after the ceremony. [15 Proverbs, last verse]

*Q: How sweet. This is very, very- [break in the tape]*

COOK: ...ceremony I haven't had.

*Q: Well, you haven't had time to do both, that's for sure. But it must be a simply thrilling occasion. Now, how soon after this and your dinner in Georgetown, did you take off?*

COOK: I think the timing, it seems to me, was almost - it couldn't have been. I must have had a weekend. I thought I took off the next day, but I was already living in temporary quarters. I was completely out of my apartment. I was staying in a friend's place in Georgetown who was away for the summer. Mother and Daddy stayed there. I was living out of my suitcases by then. It seems to me the swearing in was August 19th, so I must have had a few more days in the department and then I took off via consultations in Europe.

*Q: You want to go into that a little bit?*

COOK: It's considered sort of *de rigueur* if you're going to an African post to go for consultations in the capital of the former colonial power. I found that when I got to Burundi they kind of resented it. I think other African countries might as well. I found it enormously useful for another reason. It's because I found that in the United States so much - in this case it was Belgium - their views are cited as definitive on the former colonies, as it is on Zaire, as the French on West Africa, as the English on Kenya and South Africa, and time and again I would argue with those views in cables, and it helped me to have been there to see the people articulating these things. To know at least a little bit, from my time there, what was animating these views, what was behind it. It wasn't just factual reporting. It was valuable to me personally and substantively to have been there. Symbolically I don't think it was that much of a plus! Now I also went to London and Paris for two separate reasons and because it was no additional airfare. London (although I visited FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office.],) - the main purpose there was because that's the international headquarters for family planning organizations, but also because it's the world headquarters of the international coffee organization. When I went to Burundi we had a trade deficit with Burundi.

*Q: We did? The U.S. did?*

COOK: Because of the amount of coffee we bought from Burundi.

*Q: I didn't realize that the international coffee market was in London.*

COOK: It's all headquartered in London and that's where it's run from. It was very important to understand that, to understand the economy, to understand what role we played in the international coffee cartels and so forth.

*Q: That's about their principal crop, isn't it? Isn't that about what keeps them afloat?*

COOK: Yes. That's 85-95% of their exports. So I did those consultations and then went off to Greece for a week.

*Q: What did Paris add?*

COOK: Paris was just the Quai d'Orsay. The French had the only western military

assistance program in there. I started an American one during the time I was there, so I wanted to talk to them. I find in my years in working in Africa, it's often interesting to get the view from somebody similar but not the same, who was not the colonial [power].. The French had a lot of ties in that part of Africa, but it had not been their colony. I thought their perspective added to the Belgian one would be very interesting, and in fact it was.
*Q: Different points of view?*

COOK: Yes.

*Q: When you went out to your post, what did you regard as your principal mission? What did you hope to accomplish there?*

COOK: I felt that each of us, in whatever way we could, had an obligation to our government to try to promote (by that I mean expand) and improve US relations with our country of service. I didn't go out feeling I was ambassador to Africa. I thought I was ambassador to Burundi. I realized I had a very specific piece of real estate to deal with. The other thing that I felt was equally important, and here I think my USIS background influenced me a lot, my cultural affairs experience, was to get the country, the leaders of the country where I was assigned, to better understand the United States and its institutions, and to understand why our policy and our goals in Africa were very different from the European countries; which is really all they know, still. Independence was only the early sixties for most of these countries. I felt that there were tremendous possibilities in expanding American-African relations. I think it was deeply in our own national interest to do that, and I think it's in theirs. And to try to explore ways you can do that. Now, you have to be extremely creative every year because resources always decline, they rarely rise, and so you have to go out there with a kind of personal knowledge of American private institutions and corporations, people who can be helpful to you one way or the other. I was going into a country that had always been deeply suspicious of the United States. I knew that. I was going into a country that twice PNGed [*persona non grata* -a diplomat declared unacceptable by the host government.] American ambassadors. I knew that.

*Q: Oh, had they?*

COOK: Yes.

*Q: On what grounds?*

COOK: Suspicion of being involved with the ethnic problems.

*Q: Uprisings? Yes.*

COOK: Yes. So I knew that I was going into a country that knew very little about the United States. I think it's very important to say, even on the tape, that that is in some cases the desires of the former European colonial overlords that the United States be

viewed either poorly - or not at all! The most glaring example, because it's documentary, (but there are others, certainly in the commercial sphere) are the texts published in France for teaching English to Africans. I've seen them published by really important publishers like Gallimard. I've seen a chapter on the south and what it shows is a picture from the 1930's which shows a toilet for blacks and a toilet for whites - and that is the sole picture illustrating the chapter of the English book on the South. That kind of playing around continues in Africa, so you're dealing not only with just lack of exposure to the United States and our institutions and our people, but you're dealing with efforts, and those are by our friends - you should see what the North Koreans and the Chinese and the Russians are doing - if France can do that to us in Africa, then the other side is working. I think by the very fragility of the African institutions, because independence is so new, that a genuine fear kind of grows out of what they don't know about what the big powers might be trying to do to them and so forth. So you have to combat a lot of ignorance and fear about the United States.

*Q: Then this explains why that terrible canard about the US introducing AIDS into Africa is able to reach such acceptance.*

COOK: That's traced directly to Moscow. We know where that one came from.

*Q: Yes, but the point is it's accepted without question.*

COOK: Another canard of a whole different dimension is about the CIA and the Peace Corps. That challenge was launched twenty years ago and it's been absolutely refuted down the line. There's never been an instance of it. I thought it was a non issue, but when I was looking for ways to expand our relations with Burundi, knowing that the USAID level was at a certain level and I couldn't expand that budgetary pot. I had to go in another direction, and we opened a Peace Corps program. (We also started a small military training program, not equipment, just training, sending them here for training). That's one of the questions I had to answer directly in the foreign ministry. They said, "But what about this CIA connection with the Peace Corps?" That story is so old and it's been refuted so long ago, you'd think that it's a not an issue any more.

*Q: Isn't it in the Peace Corps charter that there absolutely can be no connection?*

COOK: It's absolutely there, but it's something, I don't know if the Russians put it out or the Europeans put it out, but it somehow... and it stayed in the subconscious. Even though it's been completely [disavowed], it's not even discussed in African countries where the Peace Corps has been operating all these years. But the Peace Corps had never been in Burundi and that was still in their minds and that's one of the questions I had to address up front. That kind of stuff just comes out and it gets to be circular. It sounds very simple, what I viewed as my mandate, it is or is not depending on the amount of energy and the amount of creativity you try to put into it. You have to try to do it with diminishing, or no, resources in these very small countries and so you have to use a lot of personal energy and imagination in reaching out to other people.

*Q: Now you've told me that in order to achieve your goals, you had to know resources back in the States that you could draw on because of the diminishing funds. How were you able to bring the Peace Corps in? That would be government funded of course.*

COOK: That was government funded. That was later. What I was referring to there was some of the things, and the department helps you on this, before you go out. If nobody has told you about it they should have, about the BCIU consultations in New York.

*Q: BCIU?*

COOK: BCIU. It's Businessmen's Council for International Understanding. No matter what country you're going to, if you're going to a country like Burundi where there's basically no US trade, or there wasn't any anyway when I went there, this Council in New York City nevertheless will set up a full day's worth of appointments for you with people who have some sort of interest either in Africa or specifically in your country of service.

*Q: Business people?*

COOK: Yes, business people, banks and so forth. Now, if you're going off as ambassador to Saudi Arabia you'll have presumably five days' worth of consultations, but even if you're going to a Burundi you have a minimum of one. And you start learning about people who are in the coffee business, or people interested in doing loans, or whatever else. So you start building up, so even if you don't have your own resources to draw on, you have those. And the department does that for everybody that goes out as ambassador.

*Q: Does that include the EXIM bank and things like that?*

COOK: That's here. This is all New York. This is purely commercial.

*Q: But you do go to the EXIM bank here?*

COOK: Oh, sure, yes.

The Peace Corps has changed over the years. The way it was when I started focusing on the question of Burundi, and I think it still is, is that you can request specific skills that the country needs. It's not just young liberal arts graduates who want to go and try to help a developing country. Now you can say I want an agricultural engineer. I need a water engineer. I need a sanitary engineer. I need a specialist in teaching English as a second language. And so forth. One of the ways that Burundi was, I think, learning about the larger world and stepping out a bit was the enormous emphasis on learning English there, which was unusual in a Francophone country. So they specifically wanted some English teachers and so forth. There was no way I felt we could do it except through the Peace Corps.

*Q: Why was this sudden emphasis on learning English? In order to compete in business?*

COOK: They felt there very strongly that that is the international language, and that you had to have that to deal commercially, to understand politically what was going on in the world. They needed it for their diplomats and so forth. But just as I learned about a culture by learning Swahili, they learned by doing it. We got some English [teachers]. I remember now, it was a long time ago, that was one of our first requests. I think we also had an AID project, an excellent reforestation project in the southern part of the country that basically we felt could be maintained by a forester volunteer, so we wanted to try to continue seeing that project going. So there was a package of the very skills that we thought could come in.

Now Burundi is a country, as are all former Belgian colonies, where there is very profound missionary impact upcountry. I don't believe that there will ever be completely smooth relations between any former Belgian country and an African government, because of the pattern of Belgian colonization - where they basically turned the, to use the Australian term “outback” over to the missionaries, and concentrated on exploiting the country economically. So that has created a pattern in the rural parts of those three countries, a pattern of dependence and loyalty, by the present population, on the foreign missionaries who provided the medical care and the educational care that they got, if any, from foreigners, missionaries, not from either the Belgian government, or, due to lack of resources, really, much from their own government after independence. There will always be, I think, in those countries a great sensitivity on the part of the African governments about the activities [of the missionaries]. That leads to missionary expulsions regularly in all three countries, arrests and so forth, because there was a kind of tension built in for the loyalty of the people.

*Q: Mostly Catholic missionaries in those countries?*

COOK: There were American fundamentalists.

*Q: The Belgians let in anybody, did they?*

COOK: There were American fundamentalist groups in Burundi I’d never heard of until I got there. I've never heard of them here. I was raised a Methodist. I'd never heard of the Free Methodists until I got there, and they're operating in Burundi. There is a group called Child Evangelicals. I'd never heard of them.

*Q: All kinds of missionaries. Why is it that none of this bringing in of the Peace Corps had happened before you got there?*

COOK: Well, I think because probably before Bagaza [Colonel Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, President of the Burundi Republic ] became president, there was a great history of ethnic tension and slaughter there. There was an unwillingness to let young foreigners loose in the interior.

*Q: I see.*

COOK: The Barundis surprised me in sort of understanding this. Really didn't feel that they needed - they didn't phrase it this way - young liberal arts graduates to come and learn about development in the country. They really needed people to work. The Peace Corps changed over the years and I think changed for the better. A lot of people had very profound experiences. I don't mean to denigrate young liberal arts [graduates], but I think later on the real business of development has to be with technical people. They knew that it changed, and we told them we'd go in and offer them specific skills. They also were very unhappy with some of the racist attitudes they were encountering among some of the younger European workers in the [assistance] programs. I think they liked what we were doing. Our AID program was very new there. It was only two or three years old when I arrived.

*Q: There were Europeans working in our AID program?*

COOK: No, working in the interior of the country on EEC [European Economic Community or Common Market.] projects, or on their own bilateral [European] projects. They had encountered a lot of racism. They had to expel some of them.

*Q: They had?*

COOK: Yes.

*Q: Now, how do we make certain that we don't send people who turn out to be racist to those places?*

COOK: You'd have to ask the Peace Corps that, but certainly if I found one on my watch they wouldn't be around any longer than [when] the next plane took off, because you just don't need that. And I think people who have those kinds of attitudes wouldn't sign up for the Peace Corps anyway. It's not a draft, it's a voluntary thing.

*Q: No, but they can be insidious the way some from other countries are. They go down there and they think they're very kind, you know that paternalistic attitudes that just sets the natives on edge?*

COOK: True, yes, But our AID program was quite new so I think this was a natural extension of the AID program. I think it's still...

*Q: The AID program was ongoing when you got there?*

COOK: It's ongoing, and I think like most AID budgets it's falling right now, which is too bad, because Burundi is one of the 25 poorest countries in the world. But Gramm-Rudman [Gramm-Rudman. – The Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Reduction Act of 1985 which imposed limitations on government spending. ] is having an enormous [effect].

*Q: Oh, I know it is. What AID programs were going on when you got there?*

COOK: There were two large ones and several smaller ones. The two large ones were, first of all, very exciting development of Burundi's peat resources. They have one of the largest reservoirs of peat in the world. And of course we had to bring in Irish technicians to work on our project because they're the great bog experts. That was about an $8 million project spread over several years. Then we had a large experimental farm in southern Burundi which basically developed good seeds for that kind of altitude and climate. An improved seed multiplication center, if you will. Then we had smaller projects, the forestation project. We had various education projects. We did some small-scale water projects to try to get [clean water]. Burundi, unlike many countries in Africa, has too many springs, if anything. The water is very clean if you just go down far enough to get it out of the ground instead of taking surface water. So we were working on smaller projects like that.

*Q: I see.*

COOK: Than we had a big PL 480, Title II food program, which was administered by Catholic Relief Services.

*Q: Can you recall your very first day at the post? When you arrived, who met you, what you did, where you went. Did you go right to the embassy.*

COOK: My arrival I will never forget because it was one of these things that only we could do to ourselves. I went out during the period of the Carter administration when he had eliminated first class air travel for everybody. I decided, politically, I wanted to arrive on Burundi Airlines. There were three or four African airlines that went through there. I made a point of going in on Burundi Airlines, which was a Caravelle.

*Q: From where?*

COOK: From Nairobi. I went down and spent a couple of days with the Harrops [Foreign Service Officer, ambassador to Kenya , 7/80 to 9/83.] on my way in to Burundi. I wouldn't go on Cam Air, Air Zaire, there are all sorts of other options I had, but I insisted on going Burundi Air. I thought it was important. So I was sitting all the way in the back end of this Caravelle on my little tourist ticket. I'd always flown tourist my whole life, but no African country sends its diplomats by tourist class. They don't send any of their diplomats by tourist class and certainly not their ambassadors. So when I got there - you know the Caravelle you go right out of the tail and then there's the first class stairs down. I looked out the window and I saw the country team lined up, and several Africans, who I thought probably were and in fact were the chief of protocol, from the foreign ministry and the various people who traditionally meet you. They were all lined up at the stairs of the first class section. So I thought now how do I handle this? Do I embarrass the United States or do I embarrass the Burundis? I decided I would do neither, so I waited until everybody was off the plane and then I walked to the front of the plane and walked down the first class stairs where they were waiting for me. [laughter]

*Q: Good for you. Isn't that funny!*

COOK: I laughed the whole way up the aisle, though, because I was struggling with a lot of hand luggage and it would have been much easier just to slip out the back, but it would have just embarrassed everybody, and it would have been absolutely inexplicable to this very poor country that I was coming there in tourist class, because those kinds of symbols are important. So anyway, that is where we started and we went straight from there to the VIP lounge and had a bit of a conversation.

*Q: The chief of protocol was the most important person in their delegation?*

COOK: Yes, which is traditional. Then the DCM took me out of the VIP lounge and said, "This is your driver," and introduced me, and, "This is your car." I was blinking because I still was getting used to this whole process. I got in and sat down and off we went into Bujumbura. I told you of all my travels in Africa, I'd never set foot in this country. There are very few pictures of it in any of the books, so I didn't even know what to expect. It's an absolutely gorgeous place because it's on the north shore of Lake Tanganyika. The city itself is not gorgeous, but the setting is just exquisite and the weather is beautiful all year long, because you're at a high altitude and on this lake. We drove into town, into the residence and everybody...

*Q: The DCM was with you, was he?*

COOK: No, he...

*Q: You were alone?*

COOK: Yes. He sent off by myself with the driver, who was a delightful person, who was my driver the whole time I was there, who told me what I was seeing as we went through town. As we went through town I said - there's a long drive into town as there is in most places - we went through town and I said, "Where's the center of town?" It's very small. He said, "We just passed it." I said, "Oh." [laughter] We went on to my house and then my secretary had the whole country team over for my first meal of that wonderful Lake Tanganyika fish and so that was my first day there.

*Q: You mean your first night there she had people over to the residence?*

COOK: It was lunch because I came in early in the morning.

*Q: I see.*

COOK: Then they let me stay at home at the residence that night by myself. I had boxes piled up. You know you ship things ahead of time so you sort of get into your mail and then into your boxes and walk around. I do not like to go to any post having anything my first night there, and I always send out instructions not to do anything the first night. It is very hard to keep them from doing it, but I think that's why they did the lunch when they

got my cable saying I wanted no event the first night. I don't like to do it and half the times I win and half the times I don't. People think you're just being shy, and I'm not. I really like to walk around the house and look at it and see what's going on.

*Q: At the airport how much of your staff was there? Your DCM?*

COOK: The DCM and all the section heads.

*Q: Did you know your secretary before you went out there?*

COOK: No. Oh, I'd met her briefly in Washington that summer, sorry.

*Q: You said you had fish, Tanganyika fish. Is there a particular way they cook it?*

COOK: This was just fried, but it's exquisite. It's Nile perch. It's just wonderful.

*Q: Had you chosen your DCM before you went out?*

COOK: No, he was there and I, in fact... Because I'd skipped so many steps in my career, that summer before I went out I asked the Department if I could go take the DCM course. I really had never been head of an embassy section. And they wouldn't let me. They said ambassadors are specifically excluded. They sent me some of the reading material. That's the most I got out of it. I'd been through the ambassadorial course, you know the one that they teach down here.

*Q: You did take that?*

COOK: Yes. I was Barbara Watson's roommate when we took our trips around the country. It was wonderful. We had a delightful time. So I knew a little bit about what to expect from that course, but not really. He [the DCM] did everything, apparently, by the book, how it's taught in the DCM course, and it's very well-organized. It's exactly what you need. He had a briefing book which he gave me on arrival and fastened to the front of it was this historic cable that you get to send out when you assume your post, which is, "Have arrived and assumed charge," for me to initial which I did with great joy. Dick Moose then had a tradition with all of his ambassadors; when he got that incoming copy he would always sign it with a very nice dedication and have it framed and send it back to you.

*Q: Did he? How nice!*

COOK: He did that for every one of his ambassadors the whole time he was at AF.

*Q: A very nice touch.*

COOK: So you really feel like you are taking charge then. But you basically don't exist as an official person until you present your credentials. Maybe I should tell you about that

next time?

[APRIL 7, 1987]

*Q: When you arrived at your post, were you absolutely exhausted?*

COOK: No, I wasn't. I'd stopped for a week of vacation en route which I'd recommend to everybody because the combination of the tenseness over the hearings, the briefings before you leave, and packing out, some people might be able to go straight to their post. Maybe people who have people to help them with these things, but I took a week in Greece on a nice little island en route, and had my birthday there. So that's why I was 35 when I presented my credentials.

*Q: Oh, your 35th birthday. All right. Now can you describe the presentation of credentials? Was it immediately? After a few days?*

COOK: The Burundis don't do it immediately. They tend to group people, and since this was the season, there were several of us presenting our credentials at the same time, of which I was the first. They made a point of having me present my credentials first of the five or six that day. Specifically ahead of the Belgian ambassador, who had arrived at post before me, but they had, as they always do, an official reason. They did it for their own political reasons, but the official reason they gave is that they received a request for my *agrément* before they received his. They did it to send a political message.

*Q: That is a message.*

COOK: It was fun. I was fully prepared, as it turned out, by my desk officer for going out there, because I was told I'd have to make a speech when I presented my credentials. It's done in some countries. So after drafting my little speech here for the swearing-in, then I had to do this one, and it's hard to do this when you don't know the country and have never been there, so I did one and of course that wasn't part of the ceremony at all. The ceremony was quite simple. I can tell you about it very quickly. I just went with the DCM, not with the whole country team. You go with the traditions of the country. So in Burundi, you take one person - obviously your DCM. We just went to the palace. He stayed in the anteroom and had a cup of tea with the chief of protocol while I had a brief conversation with the president. We exchanged letters, I mean I gave him the letter of recall of my predecessor and my own credentials and that was the whole ceremony.

*Q: You did recall your predecessor?*

COOK: Yes, I think you have two letters. They give them to you here in the presidential appointments staff. But the one point that I made in the meeting, I knew enough about Burundi to know that in the past, particularly two predecessors before me, David Mark, they'd restricted his movements. It can be a tightly controlled society. I made a point of saying in my very first conversation with the president that I'd heard that the country was very beautiful and I intended to see all of it, and that, what's more, if we were providing

aid to Burundi and had projects all over the country, we had to be able to monitor them and I wanted his permission, at first meeting, to do this. He, I think, was taken aback. This was a surprise that somebody would do this right at first. He said, "Of course, I would like you to see all of my country." So later on, at several points in my tour when people came to me and said, "You haven't gotten permission to go" here, there, or the other place, I'd reply "I have it from the president." I used it for the whole time I was there and I never sought permission. I would tell them, because they did have a subsidiary interest in security, occasionally, if I was going someplace really far in the country I would tell them, "By the way, I'm going." I didn't ask permission, ever, to go anyplace. And had they tried to buck me in that, I would have first of all referred to the president's conversation, and secondly, probably suspended AID in those areas they wouldn't let me visit. It's not acceptable that they would ask us for AID and then not let us visit the whole area. So I used that first conversation for that, and it worked.

The rest of that conversation, frankly, I'd have to look at the reporting cable. I think it was fairly unremarkable. It was a generally warm welcome. The one thing that was remarkable about it, I think, was that he told me, at the very beginning, he said, "This is an important day for me as president, and an important day for Burundi, because you are the first foreign ambassador to ever have arrived in our capital being recommended by another African chief of state." It turned out that Senghor had written him a letter. That was very nice and it was very unexpected. It set a wonderful tone to the whole thing. Because I came recommended by a fellow African chief of state, it just made a difference right from the beginning. Senghor had had the courtesy and the kindness and the forethought, and he knew a little bit about Burundi and he knew it would make a difference.

*Q: And nothing you had asked for?*

COOK: No, no, he just did it and that was lovely. And he didn't know Bagaza particularly well, but they'd see each other in OAU meetings and so forth. But it wasn't somebody like Houphouët-Boigny [Felix Houphouët-Boigny, president of the Ivory Coast.] or somebody that he dealt with regularly. It set a wonderful tone right from the beginning. Those kinds of things matter enormously, enormously in Africa. I think that just set a nice tone, and it let him know that people outside of Burundi were going to be watching, to see how I was received, and how I did there.

*Q: Normally do people have to get written permission to travel around?*

COOK: Yes, you do. One thing I fought unsuccessfully the whole time I was there, is that they are like - well the Soviet Union does the same thing, Israel does, actually, for military - you cannot technically invite anybody to the residence. You have to send the invitations to the foreign ministry and they decide who gets to come. Now as time went by, and as they saw I wasn't a threat, but was trying to promote American-Burundi relations, they basically would let, (to meals and small things), everybody come that I invited. My last Fourth of July party there I was just crushed. They took people off the list that I really wanted. I didn't do "laundry list" invitations, because I thought that's asking to have names cut. I did people that had a specific interest. Now, these are

government of Burundi employees, but in a developing country most of your contacts are government employees.

One year when I was there, I inspired myself from Eunice Shriver, and it was great fun, but I didn't try it twice because I was afraid they would stop it. But for that year we invited them because they weren't government employees. We didn't have to go to the Foreign Ministry so they didn't realize that we had invited them. We invited every little farmer's cooperative head that had received a self-help grant from us, fishing cooperatives, farming cooperatives, handicapped people who normally wouldn't be seen at diplomatic receptions. I had them all one Fourth of July. It was absolutely glorious. There were about fifty people there who clearly had never been to a diplomatic reception in their life, were clearly outside the government and very much the working class people there, and they came and had a great time. I saw the foreign minister was looking around, and thinking "where did this person come from?. [laughter] Because in a small capital like that, you see the same people at every reception. But they didn't know they couldn't come, and they had their little invitations. We had chauffeurs driving them all over the country to make sure they got them. And the ones that were really far got them by mail. And a lot of them came even from up country. It was wonderful.

I think I mentioned to you, when I talked about working for Eunice in Paris, there was so much, more even, I think, then she knows now, how much I inspired myself from some of the things I watched her do. One of the funny things about my presentation of credentials there, was when I came back to the house. You don't go in your own car for these events. The chief of protocol, I think for most of these this is true, comes and picks you up in his car. They take you with a motorcycle escort and you come back to the residence. The thing that was really touching - I really almost cried - because it was so touching to me, and I'd just forgotten that this was going to happen. When we came back into the driveway, the flag hadn't been on the house the whole time I'd been there, because I hadn't presented credentials. They had it arranged so that, when I drove up in the driveway the flag went up the flag pole. It was really very, very touching. The embassy had done that.

But the driveway was on an incline like this, and when I came back up, I recalled that in Paris, Eunice and Sarge always got out of whatever motorcade they were in - they were in some mammoth ones there - like when the astronauts first started traveling - remember the first astronauts and so forth? They always got out of their limousine, wherever they were, and they went back, and they shook hands with <u>every</u> motorcycle policeman that had escorted them. This I think was probably a campaign tactic that carried over. The French were enormously touched by it, because these people are basically ignored. So I just did the same thing. I didn't even think about doing it ahead of time. I just did it instinctively because I was thinking about them, because it was the day I was presenting my credentials. So I went back down this driveway shaking hands with the motorcycle policemen who had come up. The car was in front and they were behind. We were on an incline. I didn't realize that the brakes on a motorcycle are in the handles, and when I took their hands off the handlebars to shake hands with me, the motorcycles started sliding back down. [laughter] So I was standing there in my violet silk dress, holding this

motorcycle that was going back down the driveway! It was a terribly funny event. They were obviously touched by it, because I'm sure no other foreign ambassador had ever shaken hands with them. But I just hadn't taken account of, I guess, the engineering of motorcycles and the incline of my driveway. I kept doing things like that throughout my tour, because there were little things like that that they did in Paris, which were I thought unusual. I thought they were extremely American, and I thought spoke well of what we were about in our country.

*Q: Exactly.*

COOK: The other thing that happened, I guess, funny that day, nobody had told me what to expect. I didn't know what you do at a credential ceremony. I'd never seen one. I'd never been a member of a country team to ever go to a ceremony. So when I got out of the car at the president's palace, they had troops lined up on both sides of the road who presented arms to me. I didn't know, what do you do? Do you salute? What do you do? I grinned. I didn't know what else to do.

*Q: I don't think a woman...*

COOK: I just didn't know and I didn't expect it, I guess. I thought I'm supposed to do something in response and I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I hadn't a clue, so I just grinned at them. I found one who - they'd never had a female ambassador there before - I found one little fellow holding his arms like this and looking around his gun like this. I looked at him and sort of winked. He smiled and then I went on in. I didn't know what to do. You don't salute.

*Q: You only salute if you have a hat on, right?*

COOK: What?

*Q: A military hat, if you have a military hat on.*

COOK: I guess. I've seen military people do that. But what does a civilian do and what does a woman do?

*Q: We'll have to watch Corazon Aquino [prime minister of the Philippines] on the nightly news.*

COOK: She just walks on. There are more people like that now. I didn't have that many models to go by. Who was it, Indira Gandhi [prime minister of India] and Mrs. Bandaranaike [Sirimavo Bandaranaike, prime minister of Sri Lanka] in Ceylon. Mrs. Thatcher, I guess, was in there. What does a women do when arms are presented? I'd never thought about it and I didn't know.

*Q: It's a good question.*

COOK: But I just remember thinking, Here I am and the first thing I get out of the car and I don't know what to do. It all went very nicely, but I laughed about it all afterwards. Between the presentation of arms and the motorcycle, falling back down the driveway with me trying to hold them up.

*Q: Were the arms presented over at the presidential palace?*

COOK: Yes. They were lined up on both sides of the driveway. We pulled up and two big lines of soldiers were there and we were in between them with the flags on the car and all that. It was quite grand.

*Q: It must be very grand.*

COOK: Even in a small country like that it's very impressive and very... it's a ceremony that both impresses you and touches you and you're very proud to be in.

*Q: Oh, I can imagine.*

COOK: It's one of the proudest moments of being an ambassador, I think, is when you present your credentials.

*Q: What happened to the other people who were in your group? They don't drive?*

COOK: No, they come separately. Each man goes to the house separately. Then you invite the chief of protocol, and traditionally in most countries and it's certainly true there, for a glass of champagne. I don't know what he's like by the end of the day if he's done seven ambassadors! I was the first one, so it was okay then. He has a quick glass of champagne and then gets in his car and goes and gets the next one, and goes on. So that is the custom. We carried it out completely with the only things... I guess because this was so unexpected to me to be an ambassador, I was as much an observer as a participant.

*Q: That's a good point.*
COOK: I think because these kinds of ceremonies which I'd never... I'd never even talked to anybody before I went out about presenting credentials. I assumed that they were kind of *sui generis* for each country. I found out since that they are - but they aren't. There are certain sort of forms you go through in every country. I'd never seen them. I'd never talked to anybody about them. So you just sort of wing it and hope for the best. The chief of protocol has been through... probably most of the people in a country like Burundi haven't presented credentials before, so they guide you very well. But that was my first day

*Q: You said you wore lavender?*

COOK: Yes, I wore lavender. I think, for good luck, that I wore the same dress that I wore for my confirmation hearing. It was just a lavender silk shirtwaist dress with some flowers on it.

*Q: What does the president wear? Is he in uniform.*

COOK: A suit.

*Q: Oh, he's in a suit.*

COOK: Most of the former military presidents in Africa you only see in their uniforms in official portraits. You don't see them wear them.

*Q: They make a point of not, I suppose.*

COOK: Yes. He's one, you know, who hasn't become a field marshal. He's still a lieutenant colonel, which I think is one of the admirable... it says a lot about him, and about his role.
*Q: What do you think was the reaction of the host country to your being a woman?*

COOK: I think they didn't know America well enough to know... If it had come from any other country they may have been surprised. From America, I think, they thought anything can go. They were so in the European mold. This is true of most African countries. It's a country where women occupy less senior government positions than most others in Africa, although they named their first female ministers while I was there, which I was very pleased about.

*Q: Do you think because of you?*

COOK: I don't know. I did a lot of things there that other ambassadors didn't do, and I guess I just made a visual impact. I'm not a small person. If I'm in a crowd of Africans I stand out one way or the other.

*Q: They're rather small in stature in Burundi?*

COOK: The people who are running the government there are the famous Watusi tribe.

*Q: Oh, are they?*

COOK: But they are not tall, I'm disappointed to say. I thought I would go to a nation of eight foot tall men.

*Q: I thought they were all eight foot tall.*

COOK: I looked the president straight in the eye when I presented credentials. Now I'm 5'8" and I had on heels so he's probably 5'10", 5'11". I just did a lot of things while I was there that I thought was important for America to support that were symbolic. They didn't have AID figures tied to them, and I think they just got used to me doing that. For example when they had parliamentary elections, the first one in years when I was there,

they went around holding big meetings around the country where all the candidates spoke. There was only one party so they were all from the same party. The one in the capital was held in the stadium, and there certainly were no foreigners there except for me. I didn't ask permission to go. I called the minister of interior, who by then was a good friend, and I said, "I just want you to know that I am going." He said, "You are our guest." I went and stood right in the middle of the stadium and it was obvious to everybody.

*Q: You were an observer.*

COOK: Yes, and I was the only foreigner there. I was the only white there. But I thought that this effort at democratization should be supported by the United States. They did the same thing then when the new parliament had its first session. I was the only foreigner invited to the opening session.

*Q: Oh, really?*

COOK: Yes. I talked to them a lot about it. I think it's very exciting to work in Africa because you can promote these kinds of ideas. It wasn't Philadelphia, 1776, but damn it, they were making a step in the right direction. It's something the United States should encourage. I was the only ambassador at that, too. I kept doing things where the others... My European colleagues tended to be older, near retirement, much more classical in their approach. I was much more sort of involved and committed, more Kennedy, if you will, of being interested in various aspects of Burundi, not just going in and make *démarches* at the foreign ministry, which is kind of the classic way to operate. The Self-Help Program I thought was one of the most exciting things we did, and it's something you can get so much good out of in Africa, there's so little red tape that it has immediate impact on the lives of the people who ask for the grants. Some of the grants were $2,000, $3,000, but it would be a fishing cooperative that needed a new boat or something like that. We would just sign the agreement, they would go downstairs and get the money, and we'd go out and visit them. We visited every Self-Help Project in Burundi.

It's called the Ambassador's Self-Help Fund. It's one of the most creative things we have to use in Africa. My understanding is that it's allocated through AID, but it's given to the department to spend, so there's none of the AID red tape with it. You can use it to get around the country, you can use it to get to groups that aren't being helped by some of these big bucks AID projects, the World Bank, or other donors. You can use it and have an immediate impact. We did a clean water project up in the mountains. Burundi has a lot of water, but the water has to be tapped below the surface or else it gets dirty just by being out. We did little pumps, a lot of PVC pipe. I think our maximum dollar total was $5,000 for a project and it was usually much below that. One requirement was they <u>had</u> to come to the embassy. It was forbidden, you know, for Burundis to go to a foreign embassy at all. They had to come to the embassy and sign a Self-Help agreement. We would talk to them a little bit about their area of Burundi, and tell them America wanted to support their development projects.

*Q: They had to get permission to come?*

COOK: Again, the government people had to. I think the people out in the cooperatives didn't know they had to get permission. When I first got there, I said, "I am not paying out money to people I have not met. They have to come to this embassy, and we have to meet them." So we had a young political-economic officer who would get nominations from missionaries, American missionaries, working in the country, or people who just knew about a cooperative. Sometimes we would get it from, we eventually started getting it from ministries, because they saw it was a very quick expenditure. There was no studies, no study teams, no impact assessments. It was just something with an immediate need. It was small, but often that's all that's needed for a little community. We helped a lot of agricultural cooperatives. We even funded one I was so happy about. All the way to the northern part of Burundi we found a female cooperative!

*Q: Did you?*

COOK: They raised chickens, and boy, did we go visit them and give them money. [laughter] It was the only female project I found the whole time I was in the country. The pol-econ officer, a woman as well and I, we couldn't wait to go see them with their chickens. I wonder how they're doing. I just don't know. We both bought from them when we were up there. We bought chickens and eggs when we went to visit their cooperative.

*Q: You obviously had yourself a wonderful time. What about your DCM? Was there one there or did you select one?*

COOK: There was one there when I arrived which is, I think, standard. He was absolutely first-class. After I had been there about, I think, less then six months, he came in one day and asked if he could extend. "Absolutely." It was someone I did not know before. He did all of the things... I tried to take the DCM course before I went out and FSI wouldn't let me. [laughter]

*Q: You'd never been DCM?*

COOK: That's right. I was just trying to... Some of the things that they teach in DCM course I know he did, and he did them to perfection, and I understand why. Evidently, the highest failure rate in the Foreign Service is DCMs. There are several little techniques they teach them which help. One is letting the person know as soon as they arrive, the new ambassador, that they are in charge, rather than attempting to remain either psychologically or operationally the head of mission.

*Q: How long had he been chargé?*

COOK: I think just for a couple, three months. It wasn't a long one. But he did little things like the briefing book he gave to me in the car on the way in from the airport. I had it on the way in from the airport and attached to the cover was the cable typed out saying,

“I have arrived and assumed charge.” for me to sign. He did all the little symbolic things. There are other things which I think they're taught at that course. One is that the DCM should take a vacation, in other words get out of the country a few weeks after the new ambassador arrives and not constantly be dogging your steps. It's a way to break, psychologically. He did that. He did all of the sort of right steps. He also was extremely strong on the thing I think you need in these small missions in Africa. I, frankly, if given the opportunity again, wouldn't consider having anybody else but an admin officer, which is what his cone was. He was also a crackerjack political officer. But frequently political officers make their rise through being DCM's. The last thing you need, in these small embassies in Africa, is another political officer, because politics is not that important in these countries. What's important is development, and going out and representing America. You have a political officer. The ambassador basically in these third-world countries gets most of the good information anyway, because it's through the ministers people talk to, and you don't need a third political officer in these small embassies. What you need is somebody to help you manage everything, whether it's budgets, whether it's the admin section, whether it's the GSO, whether it's housing problems, which you spend an inordinate amount of time on. I think any ambassador does. I had never in my whole career given my embassies problems about my housing. When I got there I discovered you know - what's going on now in the Foreign Service: I had people who told me they were going to ask for transfers because they couldn't have x house or y house. He managed that whole problem. It was a post when I arrived that had the highest rate of psychiatric evacuations in the Foreign Service.
*Q: Really?*

COOK: We implemented a lot of programs and three years later we had at least that many if not more extension requests, three or four. A lot of it was luck of the draw, which officers come there, but a tremendous amount of time was spent just on morale issues. He agreed with that completely and knew how to work the system to do the things they were concerned about and knew how to produce prizes or rewards, and how to try to pull the small embassy together as a team instead of it all going off in various directions. Then when it did come time for him to leave after his extension, I asked for another admin officer there.

Morale is impacted enormously by the little things. Whether it's when your household effects arrive, what condition your house is in, whether your electricity is working, all those kinds of things. He didn't become the super admin officer, we had an admin officer, but he watched over that section very carefully. That was the place to start with morale. It's a 25% post. You've got to worry about things like that. You can't spend your whole time trying to do foreign policy designs for the United States, you've got to spend time on the basics. Then the dividends are enormous in terms of the work product you get. But that's the kind of person that can do that, I think, most effectively.

*Q: Now, you're political cone, right?*

COOK: I don't know what my cone is. I transferred over and I've just been in management since I've been in the State Department. My instincts, I think, are political

but I've never had a full-time political job. There's so much about me that...

*Q: You don't fit the pattern.*

COOK: ...is *sui generis*. I have a cone number. I've been meaning to ask what cone they put me in. I truly don't know.

*Q: Let's find out.*

COOK: I think it's interfunctional management direction or something like that. It's not anyone of the classical cones.

*Q: Oh, I see, it's that extra one.*

COOK: I think. I've never asked. It never seemed to be important.

*Q: Ask PER about that.*

COOK: If you find out, let me know.

*Q: I'll let you know. What about your staff? How large was it? How many of what did you have and so forth?*

COOK: You're asking me to go back six years. Let's see. We had four agencies, five by the time I left. We added Peace Corps. We had in terms of Americans, I'd just have to add up the numbers, I don't really know what the... We had four and later five agencies of which the largest by far at the beginning of my tour was AID. Just shortly after I left, the largest one was Peace Corps, when Peace Corps volunteers started coming in. We started two new programs while I was there. One was the Peace Corps program. Peace Corps had never been in Burundi, and we negotiated a very quick entry. I don't know how they're faring now. I've heard they've had some difficulties, but I think that's not unusual. Then, we started a military assistance program, a very small one, which was strictly IMET [International Military Education and Training.] and will probably remain so, which is military training. I guess it was my old CAO [Cultural Affairs Officer] background again, I thought this whole exchange, getting more Burundis out of the mountains to the States, to see what we were about, could help us more than any single thing in Burundi, because there was a great deal of suspicion. A couple of our ambassadors had been PNGed from Burundi.

*Q: Is that so?*

COOK: Yes. I think it was just a great deal of suspicion. They knew the Belgians and didn't like them, and they sort of thought everybody from outside was like that, you know, involved in their internal politics, and so forth, which we certainly weren't. And so I saw the military assistance program as just another version, another extension of the USIS exchange program. I had one of the best PAOs [Public Affairs Officer.] in the

agency, a young woman, who is now PAO in Denmark. She had a really massive exchange program. I think the second largest one in Africa was out of Burundi while I was there. She really believed in this concept, too. She even did things like using Fulbright scholarships for military officers, which some USIA officers wouldn't touch. She said that, and we agreed completely, that these are the people that control, that run the country. So. these are the people that you need to know something about the United States. She didn't send them off on the Fulbright program studying military subjects. They went to do, and this was very much Bagaza's idea of how he trained his military, they went off to get master's degrees in mathematics at Penn State. Then they would come back and they would teach both at the military academy and at the University of Burundi. But the point is that they were part of the elite of the country. So we started using, first of all, part of the USIS program for military officers.

Then we got an IMET program which was pure military training, you know, Fort Leavenworth [in Kansas] and so forth. To do that then we had the first ever official visit by defense attachés, and we got them accredited while I was there. They were based in Kinshasa, and they covered all the countries around Zaire. But again they were particularly honored by the Burundis. They came and presented credentials and made a very good impression. The senior defense attaché was a former POW in Vietnam, so I had a particular fondness for him. Then when they came back to Burundi on army day, they were one of only, I think, about three foreign military delegations invited to sit in the tribune with the president. So there was a special, I think... I think my desire to get them to know more about the United States was warmly reciprocated on the other side. I think they felt they needed to know something beyond... because of their distrust - I don't want to exaggerate - but I think part of the reasons for their relations with the Libyans, Cubans, and North Koreans who were also there (not exactly our kind of diplomatic corps, right?) was their distrust of European motives in Burundi. This was the only other way they knew to go. It was a deeply Christian country with a lot of European-educated Burundis, and I think a lot of people weren't quite comfortable with that and were willing to see what else was out there. Now, America never offered any of these things before. They always, of course, asked us for military equipment and this that and the other. We had to go through the painful process that you have to go through in every country where you start a military program, explaining that we don't give away military equipment to anybody, you know. To the extent that we make terms extremely favorable, it's countries where we have bases, which we didn't contemplate asking for in Burundi. So we got it down quickly to the IMET group of programs. But they kept asking, of course, for equipment. But I think they were pleased to have that and they were very pleased, I think, with what their trainees came back with from military training, and we were delighted with the people they sent. The people they sent, we had two or three a year by the time I left. I would go to the airport and see every one of them off. I would have every one of them to dinner, a group dinner with their senior officers (the military weren't allowed to go to diplomatic houses at all). I told them to have this program they had to do that. It would help them learn something about America to be in an American house before they went to America.

*Q: Of course.*

COOK: So I had them over with their wives and we had a dinner for them. Most of them had never met a foreigner. We had a little dinner for them and I'd go to the airport and see everyone of them off. And if they came back at any point I would see them all when they came back. The first group we sent, they were tops in their class every place they went in the United States. So they worked very hard on it. The problem in any of these countries, of course, is getting people with good enough English.

*Q: Was English as a foreign language part of the USIA program?*

COOK: Oh, yes, we had a large English teaching program, and really very senior people in it. It was just amazing. It was part of the attempt, I think, to move out into the world and away from the European experience that they'd had and did not like. The Belgians, it's an historical fact, did get deeply involved in internal politics and culture in the three countries that they had in Africa, which were Rwanda, Burundi, and Zaire, and the Africans did not like that experience. It had been bloody in fact. I think they looked askance. The French were very prominent there in military assistance. The Belgians cut it off after all the slaughters in '72 and the French eventually came in. They became very important, and much more important than the "baddies." But [the Burundis] wanted to spread out. My instincts and their desires sort of met. It's a small country but I think it's a country where we made a lot of progress in that way.

*Q: Were these your initiatives that you have been telling me about?*

COOK: Yes. You know, when you're in a country that is not of prime political interest to us, you have a small AID program. And what you have to try to do - and for this you have to draw on all your previous experiences, and your internal resources, and every visitor that comes through, and all your visits to Washington - to tap the various pots of money that are available in this government. There are a lot of them here. Our [AID program] was $10 million when I was there, five in development assistance and five PL480. In a program that size the Peace Corps entry or an IMET entry or something like that stacks up OK - and it expands the range of both your contacts and what you're doing for your country. People who served a long time in these countries, or if they had come up through the Foreign Service system, more than I, might be more aware of these programs, but I learned it all really out there - just by talking to people and figuring out that there were separate spigots you could use. You had to get AF bureau support for it, but they knew what I was doing and they realized that it wasn't in our interest to have a country that was hostile to us there. Burundi was terribly hostile to the US in history. Not only had they expelled a couple of ambassadors, but they were the authors of the "Zionism is a form of racism" resolution at the UN! They'd done various other things along that line that had been way out of proportion to their size. A lot of it I felt over time was just a lack of knowledge of the United States. And fear!

*Q: Fear probably had a great deal to do with it. Was one of the PNGed ambassadors your immediate predecessor?*

COOK: No, it had been... let's see... three or four removed, I think. It's a famous case,

anytime you read an article about the translation/interpretation services office here in the State Department. The letter expelling him had been mailed from Burundi to the White House, and it had come over in the batch of letters they always send over from the White House, that are in foreign languages. The interpreter was sitting there just reading it one day, and they'd gotten it three or four weeks after it had been mailed in Bujumbura, by the ministry. We thought it was a very funny example, because the interpreter that read it said, "My goodness." Looked at the date on the letter and realized what they had.

*Q: And the ambassador was still sitting at the post?*

COOK: Yes, and didn't know anything about it.

*Q: Didn't know anything about it? (Laughter) That's funny. Well, not too funny for him. So the State Department had to notify him. You must have had about 35 officers, roughly?*

COOK: Not that many. Our largest was AID with seven officers. So we were smaller then that. We had about an equal number of State. We had contractors... you know AID operates a lot with contractors. So you have a bigger community, to look after, on the official payroll than what it shows in the list of officers.

*Q: How many nationals did you have?*

COOK: I think the whole embassy was under 125. But you have massive GSO sections in Africa, and drivers and so forth. It was still a fair-sized staff even for a country that small. It was the kind of combination that you end up with in Africa. There's always a fair refugee component in most embassy staffs in Africa.

*Q: Is that so?*

COOK: Yes. I think refugees all over the world tend to... it's true of our European embassies as well. There so many refugees working in all of them. I think they tend to congregate around foreign missions because they feel a bit safer. There were equally refugees working in CRS. We had CRS there to the handle PL 480.

*Q: Now what's CRS?*

COOK: Catholic Relief Service. And they worked full-time on this program so they were the same as embassy staff, the three Americans who weren't really embassy staff. It was kind of hard when you say, "What was your staff?"

*Q: Because you have odd things.*

COOK: But really are part of your "protection mandate."

*Q: After all the ambassador is responsible for all the Americans in the country.*

COOK: [Nods yes.] The other thing that I tried to do early on there, in addition to making sure that I could travel around the country... There had been a history of missionary expulsion from Burundi, which had recommenced in recent years, which makes me very sad... In the first six months, I went to call on all the [American citizen] ones who were in Bujumbura, who had headquarters there, and there were some unusual groups that I frankly had never heard of, even as an American - a lot of them evangelicals, but I made a point of calling on them, and I went in the middle of the day, in the official car with the flag on the car to make sure the Burundi government knew I was calling on them. I didn't have discreet meetings with them. I went at high noon so everybody could see where I was going. Otherwise, I didn't run around town with the flag on my car all the time (which some young ambassadors or chargés do!). I did it when I wanted to make a point, or when I was going someplace official. I did the sort of standard... You do it for national days or when you're going to call on the president.

*Q: You're very good on symbolism, aren't you?*

COOK: Yes, it's important in that country. So I went around and called on all of the missionaries. From years of living in Africa, they're all wonderful cooks, so you had nice cookies and things at each of the meetings! Sometimes it was just a husband and wife I'd call on. For the Seventh Day Adventists I ended up going there on a day that they had a regional meeting from all over Africa, and they asked me to talk to them extemporaneously, and I did. They're involved in medical and educational work. It's not just proselytizing and religious work, they're doing all sorts of development things all over Africa. Some of them I knew in Burundi had been born in Burundi.

*Q: Really?*

COOK: They'd been there that long. So I made a point of calling on them and sort of expanding the wings of the embassy over them. I also opened up the swimming pool at the residence one day a week to any American resident of Burundi. That translated as the missionaries. It was a work day for us at the embassy.

*Q: To all Americans?*

COOK: Resident in Burundi, and that was exclusively missionaries. People who didn't have any connection to the embassy. There were no private sector people at all, no businessmen. What that meant was the missionaries came, and they came from the hills, way back in northern Burundi. They'd come down because they knew my pool was open to them on Friday. I'd have the full residence staff there. It wasn't a party, I didn't offer refreshments or anything, it was just this was an American house and this was their pool to use one day a week. My predecessor had the pool closed even to embassy employees. I changed that a great deal. It was working on the whole morale issue again.

*Q: When did you let the staff use it?*

COOK: Anytime they wanted to.

*Q: You didn't set aside particular hours?*

COOK: I was very lucky, because of the geography, if you will, of the residential area. There were was what the French call a little bosquet, a small little group of tropical trees and so forth, between the pool and tennis court area, and the residence. (I know some ambassadors had to walk through their house to get to the pool.) When I first got there it bothered me that the pool had been closed completely, except for Fourth of July parties, by my predecessor. So I opened it up immediately after going, via a lot of personal angst stuff about the insurance question. Even though I had people sign waivers, in fact they had no legal bearing and I knew that. So if anything happened I could have been in a great deal of personal trouble. Some people look at that very seriously, and say it's not worth the risk. I felt the morale question was worth the risk, and so I opened it up. When I first opened it up some employees tended to come into the house a lot. I'm not particularly a swimmer or a tennis player, although I did like to use it some. I really wanted to have some privacy left, and so the house was off limits. When I first opened it up two or three people came through on three or four different weekends wandering through the house asking the residence staff for something. That, we made very clear, was off limits. They got used to it very quickly and they'd bring their little soft drinks and sandwiches and so forth. I think particularly the embassy people who had children enjoyed having... It was the only really good swimming pool in the country. The one at the hotel wasn't that safe. They didn't do the chemicals and things you should.

*Q: You didn't use it yourself certain hours of the day? Not at all?*

COOK: The staff wasn't that large. It was an Olympic size swimming pool and a wonderful clay tennis court. We had the two-hour lunch break which you have in Africa, so I would often... I could have lunch by the pool and I could swim then and nobody would be there because they wouldn't have time to run back and forth. I never found that there was a real conflict. I entertained enormously at that pool, and I did it because it was American, again.

*Q: You had pool parties, and let people swim?*

COOK: Yes. The poor Burundis had never been to one in their lives. My own personal taste was French food and I had one of the best French chefs working for anybody in the Foreign Service, but at these pool parties I would always do American food. I made it an American barbecue. It was hot dogs when they arrived and then later in the day there would be grilled chicken and grilled ribs. We had a huge barbecue area down by the pool, and I had constructed next to it a stove that burned peat because one of our projects in Burundi, a big five million dollar project, was using peat as an alternate source of energy. It has among the largest peat reserves in the world. (We were trying to get them to use this form of energy, because their petroleum energy has to be driven overland from the port at Mombasa which is an enormous expense, so we were trying to get them to use peat in various ways.) And by the time I left they were using it in bakeries and so forth.

So I had a peat stove built next to the pool. And every time we had a party, I insisted that one pot had to be on the peat stove. My cook didn't particularly like to use it, because he was used to using the charcoal to barbecue. But I insisted that he always had to have one thing on there. The Burundis were always going over there looking at it.

*Q: How do you think of these things?*

COOK: It just seems natural.

*Q: I don't think that would have ever dawned on me to use a peat fire.*

COOK: Absolutely. A lot of them had never seen peat in Burundi. If it's going to be an alternate source of energy for them, then they need to get used to seeing it and they need to get used to seeing it in big houses, not just where the peasants are. One of their national dishes is some form of beans, so we always did our baked beans on the peat stove. They got used to seeing that.

*Q: Slow cooking.*

COOK: Yes, they got used to seeing it and how it works. The cook would explain to them when he had to light it and how long it would last.

*Q: You have to light them well ahead, don't you?*

COOK: Yes. The cook would always be there and he would talk to them about it. There were all sorts of rumors going on that it made this terrible smell, it did this, that, and the other, and they saw it didn't.

*Q: Where did you get your cook, by the way?*

COOK: He was a remarkable man who was first a night guard. We had these guards walking. I had guards walking around my garden with spears. That's the level of security there was! My father took a spear home to Florida. He thought it was the most wonderful thing he saw!

*Q: What I wanted to get into was your relationship with members of the cabinet and other government officials. You've already told me about meeting the chief of state.*

COOK: The persons you need to build on in these countries (it was absolutely true in my case, except I didn't have much of a running field) are the people who have an American experience, who understand what you're about, and who have a stake in seeing you succeed because it's part of their CV at this point, too. We happened to have one remarkable one in Burundi who became a very good friend. His title was Minister of Energy, Public Works, and Mines. He graduated from NYU and went out of his way immediately when I got there - and he does with every American ambassador, it wasn't just Frances, but we became particularly good friends - For example, he had me over to a

dinner at his house [with] about five or six other ministers, and I was told that no foreign ambassador had ever had such an event, even previous American ones. For some reason he'd decided it would be nice. It sort of gave his blessing to my time there. It also helped that he was "first among equals" ( a relative of the president, reputedly) at the time I was there. He wasn't prime minister. They didn't have one. So it helped to have that kind of attention very early on. I hadn't been there two months when that happened. He also happened to be an American baseball and basketball and football nut. Boy, did I get the videotapes in and have private showings for him. [laughter]

*Q: I can imagine.*

COOK: And he enjoyed it enormously. I had superbowl showings at the residence for a government minister.

*Q: There's all sorts of stuff there to use if you...*

COOK: When I got into trouble, some ministries wouldn't deal with me, not because they were anti-Americans, because they had these very strict rules. They knew if they got outside of the non-fraternization rules they were in trouble. I would call him on things that really mattered to us even if it was totally outside of his area. You can't overuse that or you destroy it. So I tried to use it very sparingly, but several times we really had issues that were very important to us and we just couldn't get any movement out of the government. I would call him, and he would invariably go to bat for us. So that's the kind of person you automatically hold on to in any country, not just in Africa, but in any country. In Burundi we had one, and he happened to be a very good guy so we were lucky on that. He was also the "minister of the peat," among other things. We'd take trips together up country to look at the peat projects and things.

*Q: What do you say about their deposits? What do you call them?*

COOK: Peat deposits. I started reading about them out there. I didn't know what it was because I was reading in French. I didn't know the word in French for peat because I'd never used it. I think it's one of the largest reserves in the world. I can't tell you where they rank right now- (end of tape)

[The oral history ended here. Ambassador Cook received a new assignment and was obliged to devote her time to preparing for it. She subsequently served overseas as consul general at Alexandria, Egypt and as ambassador to Cameroon and to Oman. She retired in 1999.]

*End of interview*