

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

AMBASSADOR PENNE PERCY KORTH

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INTERVIEW

[Note: This transcript was not edited by Ambassador Korth.]

Q: Could you give me a bit about your background?

KORTH: I grew up in Texas. My father was from New Orleans, my mother from Mississippi and we eventually ended up in Texas, transplanted by the Korean War because my father was called back into active duty. But having said that, what you need to know is that it is a very Southern family -- the Percys are all from the South: Mississippi, Louisiana.

Q: Are you any relation to the editor Walter Percy?

KORTH: ...and senator from Mississippi, and Chuck Percy who is a former Senator is from a branch of that family. But I'm a Texan. I've spent enough time there to be almost certified, although I wasn't born there. I grew up there, went to school there, studied communications at the University, met my husband at the University of Texas. He had just graduated from Princeton and was in UT Law School, and when he graduated from law school he came to Washington to practice law with his father, who had maybe a year or two before retiring as Secretary of the Navy for President Kennedy. So what you have here, and what it's been now twenty-seven years, is a marriage: one Republican and one Democrat...very strong on the Democratic ties. We came to Washington when President Johnson was here.

Q: Would you explain a little about your husband?

KORTH: I met him in Austin, at the University, when he was in law school, and we were together there, and then when he graduated and I left Austin, and he came to Washington, then distance became the great catalyst -- it was too far.

Q: How did you develop your Republican ties?

KORTH: Strictly with my father. He was one of the first Republican chairmen in McLennan County, Texas -- Waco, where I grew up, and it just became a fascination for me at a very early age. So much so, that after my sophomore year at the University, I came up here for a Summer Internship with John Tower who was a Senator from Texas at the time. It just was something that grew and grew, and then when Fritz -- my husband -- came up here, he said, "Would you mind living in Washington?" -- the bug had already bit. While I was in Austin, I worked for the Lieutenant Governor, I worked for a Senator -- Ben Barnes and John Connally. Of course Kennedy, unfortunately, was killed in Dallas -- I was in Austin waiting as part of a student welcoming committee. By then I had spent the summer in Washington, as all young people in '63 -- even though I was working for a Republican Senator -- I was fascinated and enamored of government, of what could be done--

Q: It was hyper-charged, people were committed --

KORTH: It was a fabulous time, the summer of '63 -- it was the summer of the great Civil Rights March. It was a very charged town to be in that summer.

Q: Then when you moved to Washington, how did you get involved?

KORTH: When I moved to Washington, I was a very quiet Republican. I had just married a Democrat, there was a Democratic administration, and then we started our family, and all those sorts of things were put on a back burner. I did volunteer work, I was always Republican-oriented, but not really until '81 when Ronald Reagan ran, and George Bush, which is what brought you here today. I worked on the Bush campaign. I worked on the

Connally campaign, because we had two candidates from Texas running for President. And that's when I became more active in Republican things.

Q: When you say you worked on the Republican campaign, what did you do?

KORTH: Initially, only as a volunteer. I volunteered first at the Connally campaign, became a protégé of Jim Brady -- the wonderful Press Secretary who was then working on the Connally campaign -- and when it became clear that Connally obviously was not going to be the nominee of the Republican Party, I went over to the Bush campaign and worked on Reagan-Bush. When Reagan was elected, I was appointed to be vice-chairman of an event at the Kennedy Center, and worked on his Inaugural as vice-chair of a beautiful dinner that then became a tradition. I went from there to little jobs, in and out, but always kept in very close touch with George Bush who was Vice President at the time. In Austin, while I was at the University, when he ran his first Senate campaign, Senator Tower had called and said, "Penne, I know you're in school and I don't want to mess with your studies, but there's a wonderful young man down in Houston running, and he has no name recognition, and we Republicans have got to do something. Would you and your roommate" -- who had been my roommate in Washington the previous summer -- "open up an office, do some envelopes." I said, "Sure, I'd be grateful" -- I like politics, I loved what was going on in Washington -- "Please let me know what his name is so we can introduce him." He said, "This guy's great -- his name is George Bush."

Q: My brother -- his name is Bud Bryan -- was working on the campaign back in Houston. He had known Bush when they were both in the oil business, up in Midland.

KORTH: Exactly, which is where he got his start before he went to Houston and did Zapata Oil. The President -- then the Senator-hopeful -- used to come to Austin and sit -- it was just the three of us -- and help get out his mail, and we became friends, and of course, the Bushes were in and out of Washington with a variety of assignments over the years. The friendship is personal as well as political.

Q: So in '81 you became re-engaged, your children were beginning to grow up -- what were you doing then?

KORTH: I was doing a lot of local charitable events. I was on the Symphony Board. I was on the Woodrow Wilson House Board. I was on the White House Preservation Board. I effectively was a volunteer but I was working very hard.

Q: That's part of the system.

KORTH: Exactly. It's part of the American Way. It's something that -- as I have traveled the world, particular being Ambassador -- is unique to this country.

Q: It is. The high-class talent, the efforts that go into volunteer work -- we take for granted -- they're really not available other places.

KORTH: It was something I could do in Washington on my time, before my children came home from school. And they -- in those years, and really still are though they're not at home any more -- are my priority. So by the time four o'clock came, Mom had done all her activities, and I was waiting either to pick them up or to greet them when they came home from school, and that was always the priority.

Q: As the Reagan administration, which was eight years, progressed, did you move into more and more of things.

KORTH: I began to do special projects for Vice President Bush. He would call up -- we did a very big project on very short turn-around -- with Secretary Rogers on Afghanistan. It was when human rights were at rock bottom -- not that they're better now, but they were putting these mines that were injuring the children terribly, and it was something that was a great concern. The Administration had not come out on it one way or another, so the Vice President took the lead and called me, and said, "Pull all this together. I've got Secretary Rogers, I've got French doctors flying in to give testimony, you've got the Kennedy Center -- whatever buttons you need to push, I'll try and help you," and we did it. And that was really the first serious re-involvement with Vice President Bush, although we were seeing one another as Republican friends, as personal friends.

Q: Talking about getting things together on the mining problem, which did cause considerable concern as it came out -- we were concerned about the Soviets scattering mines about the countryside -- how did that work?

KORTH: It was a consciousness-raising sort of thing. the administration had not come out firmly on a position. We did it the week there was a huge march about Afghanistan here in Washington, and it was to coincide and say that, really, the Vice President, the Administration were aware of it and wanted something done about it -- they wanted the public to react to it much the way the media has taken the lead on Bosnia and is still, as we speak, waiting for the Clinton Administration to take a firm position on what it will do.

Q: During the time up to election of George Bush as President in 1988, you were keeping in touch. Were you also involved in other things?

KORTH: Keeping in touch, involved in other things. In late 1985, I took a job with Sotheby's -- an art auction house which has been in business just over 200 years. I went in at a time when the economy was pretty good, but already there was a crack in that dam, particularly in Texas. I think that was the initial reason for my hiring, because many, many corporations, particularly the oil companies and the banks, had private collections of art, and they were beginning to have to sell these collections off. De-accession is the word in the auction business: "We're not selling our collection, we're deaccessioning it." So the New York group decided that user-friendliness was to send someone with a Texas accent they would be comfortable with.

Q: I might say for the record here that you have a delightful Texas accent which I'm afraid won't get into the written transcript.

KORTH: The deaccessioning with bankers and estates led me to be named a Senior Associate in the Trust and Estate Department with Sotheby's, not only in Washington. I then began to travel all over the United States and help people deaccess in a nicer way, so that it was not painful, so that it was done with a great deal of discretion. I would go in and give lectures on the art market -- it was a time, the late 80s, when the art market was over the moon. The Japanese buyers were here, they were inflating the market. It was the time when the Duchess of Windsor's jewels were sold. I took that collection as a nucleus and went all over the country for Sotheby's and began to do events for them at museums, private clubs, with the kind of audience, the very top of the art market, which they were aiming at.

Q: Both for getting and for selling.

KORTH: Exactly. Either way. Interest them in coming to New York where the major salesroom is. In one instance, we had a former ambassador -- Clare Boothe Luce. After Ambassador Luce died, her jewelry was taken to Sotheby's. They traveled it, as they often do, and one of the places they brought it to was Washington, and here in our home we had fifteen-twenty million dollars worth of jewelry and lots of guards. An "opening night," if you will, for people to come and see Ambassador Luce's jewelry. So it was a nice segue from talking about trusts, talking about legal things in the art world. Then on Election Night in 1988, my phone rang -- I was back in Washington -- and a voice said, "The Vice President would like to speak with you." I said, "Great, I'm right here!" It was George Bush, and he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "What am I doing? You're in Houston and the election returns are about to come in -- I'm waiting. I've hung out my Texas flag, I've got champagne in the freezer, and we're just waiting." He said, "What are you doing for the evening?" "I said, "We were going out to Dean Burch's house [former head of the Republican National Committee] to watch the returns." I was so excited.

And he said, "I've got a serious question to ask you." At that moment, I was still calling him 'George.' I said, "Sure, George." He said, "No, no, no, a really serious question, and I need an answer right away." I said, "Yes, sir." At that moment, I stepped over the line. "I said, "What is it?" He said, "If I win tonight" -- I said, "Of course you're going to win" -- it was pretty obvious. He said, "No, no. I will not say that until it's over. If I win tonight, tomorrow morning I want to have my first press conference. I want to announce that Baker will be Secretary of State. I want to announce who will be head of the Transition, and if you'll do it, I'd like to announce you and Bobby Holt (who is a fund-raiser from Texas) will be chairmen of my Inauguration." And it took no time at all -- I said, "Yes, sir, I'd love to do it." And he said, "Are you sure?" And I said, "Yes, sir, you've got it. Whatever you need. And, Mr. President" -- for the first time: it gives me chills, talking about it -- "I'll do my best, whatever it takes." He said just one thing after that, "Bobby Holt is in charge of raising the money to make this inauguration go, which frees you up to do the thing you do best. You are in charge of how it looks, how the Bush family looks, how America looks to the world,

what our goals will be. I will work closely with you. You craft the picture of the next four years."

Well, I can tell you, Mr. Kennedy, it was the most exciting assignment that I could ever imagine. I said, "Yes, sir. I'll do it. I'll be quiet tonight at the party. I won't say a word. It's yours to announce." But at that moment I became the Co-Chairman of the Inauguration and I became the first woman appointed in the Bush Administration.

Q: Now could you explain -- although these are focused on foreign affairs -- when I've got history in front of me, I'm going to take history and collect it. OK, the almost-President-elect tells you to craft the look of the new administration. What did you do? Sit down and look up at the ceiling? How did you go about doing this?

KORTH: Well, as we had been discussing earlier, I had been friends with the Bushes for years, and I knew just from the campaign the things they were emphasizing. Even then it was clear that we were moving away from the glitter of the 80s and of the Reagan Administration. Not that Bush so much was distancing himself from that, but they are two very different men and their priorities were different. The Bushes always, always, always, put their family first. They are a very close family -- lots of children, lots of grandchildren. Quite tragically, early on, they lost a child, which had a tremendous impact on them, and it drew them closer, if anything, as tragedies tend to do in families. So he said, "It's going to be one of children, of grandchildren, we're going to be going off in a different direction and those are the kinds of things I want to emphasize. I'll be in touch as we go along. That's what's happening." And so it was, and it was a wonderful thing to be able to put on the face of America for five days a small preview of what the next four years would be like.

Q: Well, did you have any contact with Jim Baker who was the Secretary of State nominee at that time?

KORTH: Of course. He's another Texan. You forget we're tight back to Texas here.

Q: Oh, I know!

KORTH: It's very strong -- Democrats or Republicans. The Bakers and the Korths had been friends for many, many years. But he was not having the input so much directly on the Inauguration as both President and Mrs. Bush did. We met with Jim -- now Mr. Secretary -- on occasion, but the input came directly from the Bushes.

Q: Then after the Inauguration, what happened?

KORTH: After the Inauguration which -- I have to footnote here -- was the most exciting, moving, patriotic job anyone could ever have. Can you imagine -- first of all, we raised private funds. I think you should know that Inaugurations are not done with public funds. Bobby Holt was every bit as good as the President said he was, and he raised every bit of the money and paid the bills, and we had two million dollars left over, which we gave to Mrs.

Bush, primarily for literacy, but to be used in any way that she wanted. So that as she went around the country, as she spoke at special interest groups -- whether it was old folks or whether it was literacy or whether it was a children's cause -- she was able to say that the Administration, from private funds would like to leave you a donation. It was just the frosting on the cake: to do it strictly from private funds, pay the bills, and have something left to do good works. So that was how it ended. I had only taken a leave of absence from Sotheby's at that point. I went right back to Sotheby's and continued the work. I did a big party in San Francisco and lecture -- it was a big opening of jewelry again, out there.

I was invited to the first state dinner of the Bush Administration. It was President Mubarak of Egypt. The Mubaraks came to Washington -- I can't tell you the excitement -- you know, the campaign, the election, the inauguration having come and gone -- to look around the room and see it filled with friends. We'd all worked for so many years to get there and I was sitting where I could see the President and catch his eye.

I could see Jim Baker a little bit to my left, and other people, and it was just beyond belief, the excitement: We've made it! And America's got the best man for the job! He's a good man, he's got great integrity, he's got his programs ready to go! After dinner, I had left the dining room and Jim Baker was coming out the door, and he opened his arms and said, "Great job!"-- the Inaugural had been maybe six weeks before -- "We're so proud of you!" And I said, "It was my pleasure!" Your adrenalin goes when you can say, "I want the Marines to play every patriotic song they know, and the Air Force and the military -- we're the greatest country on earth -- show them off to their best advantage.!" And as he hugged me, he whispered in my ear, "If we send you away, will you go?" And I leaned back and said, "Are you mad about the Inauguration?" He said, "No, no, no, I have a plan." And I said, "Sure."

That was on Friday, and on Monday, Chase Untermeyer who was Head of Personnel at the White House called and he said, "I don't know what you did over the weekend, but I got a call from the President and the Secretary of State, and they want to offer you an embassy." And I said, "Chase, you know I'm back at Sotheby's, and I love my job and I travel." He said, "Let's talk about this." And he said, "Would you like to go to Mauritius?" And I said, "Where?" He said, "It's in the Indian Ocean." I said, "I know about where it is." Chase said, "Wait a minute -- I've got an atlas -- I'll put you on hold, you get an atlas." So we both, on the phone -- and he said, "Do you see Africa? It's a little island east of Africa." And I said, "I see it! Great! It's a big island!" He said, "No, no, that's Madagascar. You have to go a little bit further." That's a very small country.

I said, "Obviously, I have to speak with my husband, my children. This will be a tremendous change for our life. I think I'm up for it." So that was the call, and it went from there to speaking to Fritz, to talking to the children, to reading a lot, a lot, a lot about Mauritius.

Q: Well, Mauritius is one of our oldest posts -- the 1790s, I think, because of the whaling

KORTH: Exactly. The Boston whalers went there to reprovision. I know a lot about it and love it with all my heart. But then, I thought, Gosh, it's a long way away. I spoke, of course, to the President on more than one occasion, and I said, "OK." And he said, "Penne, you're going to have to trust me on this one. It's a wonderful post. You will do well there. I really want you to do it if it's what you want to do." I never turned down George Bush, or the President, ever before, and I wasn't about to then, so I accepted. And when I was sworn in, Barbara Bush came to the swearing-in, and Jim Baker came and swore me in, and Senator Danforth from Missouri who is a good friend of ours came. He's a clergyman, and it was the first time a clergyman had blessed a mission in the State Department -- it was difficult to get them to agree to let me do that -- it was very interesting. So I had all of these wonderful friends and people there, and as only a mother can do -- I introduced my mother to Jim Baker, and said, "Mother, I'd like for you to meet the Secretary of State" -- and instead of saying "How do you do?" she said, "Mr. Secretary, WHY have you sent my daughter so far away?"

Q: It couldn't be farther away.

KORTH: No. And he looked her right in the eye and said, "Mrs. Percy, I'm sending her there because she is capable and because it is safe." My mother already knew I was capable -- what she wanted to hear was that it was safe. And that was the end of the conversation. Then she was satisfied. And after that it was just a wonderful roller-coaster. And all of that is how I got there.

Q: You're nominated for this place, there's the preparation and the hearings -- I'm trying to get the feel for the process, both for career and non-career people. So your name is put forward. How did you interact with the Department? How did they prep you up and how did you prep yourself up before you went up there?

KORTH: It came about in several ways. President Bush appointed a lot of ambassadors at once, so the first thing that happened -- as a woman who had not had diplomatic experience, but an old Washington hand, not State Department experience other than peripheral arrangements in Washington with the International Club and friendships: Paul Sarbanes took great umbrage at this, Senator Sarbanes from Maryland, and he took it upon himself to be sure the Bush appointees were up to speed and could do the job that the American people needed to have done. Having said that, I thought to myself, I said to myself, All right, I'll show Senator Sarbanes that I am capable, that I am serious, and that I'll do a good job for this country. The advantage I think I had, Mr. Kennedy -- I know I had -- was being a Washingtonian. The first thing I did was call Sotheby's and say, "It is over. I am going to start going to the State Department as though it were a job, every day, until I go before Senator Sarbanes, and there's nothing I can't answer about Mauritius, and no history that I don't know, and no department that I haven't visited in order to get confirmed in this job." And they said, "Fine. Good luck. We'll miss you but go for it!" In doing that, I think I was probably extremely lucky to have a desk officer named Walter Manger -- for the record, I want his name in it -- Walt Manger was the desk officer for East Africa. It was a little bit of a slow summer because the Administration was new, and Walt Manger and

Hank Cohen and a whole group of people in the East Africa Department, I think, recognized that I was serious. They said, "If you're as serious as we think you are, you've got it." And I went to the State Department every day, minus the three hours when I was in language school -- French language school in Virginia -- until time for the hearings. And I will tell you that the State Department -- and I know, and of course, you being a Foreign Service Office, don't understand the dynamics sometimes of the political ambassadors, and you wonder: Why is it that these people, when we've worked our whole career, the President can come in laterally and say, You, go to this wonderful post. And I can understand myself now, after four years in the Foreign Service, that thought. But at that moment -- political connections were obviously in place -- I wanted to have the best possible connections inside the State Department.

Q: You were very, very wise.

KORTH: I knew you were the ones who would have to help me. The President is busy, the Secretary of State is on the seventh floor -- the people who were going to help me when I got to post were the people in the State Department who had trained for years and years, who know their job and knew my country. I said in my swearing-in speech, "The State Department wrapped protective wings around me," because I wanted so badly to do this job right.

Q: Getting down to more specifics, what do you do? You come to the State Department -- how do you prep yourself?

KORTH: Walter Manger again. He laid out a program for us, for four or five months -- reading cables, visiting every bureau, visiting TDP [Trade & Development Program], visiting all the agencies that were of interest in the country of Mauritius that I needed to know about before I got there. Looking at pictures of the ministers of Mauritius. Reading their background and biographies. Everything possible that I needed to know about Mauritius, he put me in touch with the right person. I was at the Defense Department, I was at the Pentagon, I was at TDP on sugar -- which is a sort of pseudo-trade program but they have some independent funds. I was at OPIC, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation. I was everywhere, all over town, determined to do it right, and when the time came, I was ready.

Q: How did the hearings go?

KORTH: They went very well. Senator Paul Simon from Illinois is Chairman of the Subcommittee -- he beat my cousin Chuck Percy, how can I forget that. I went up with three other Foreign Service officers. Senator Simon and two or three others came in and the questions would go straight across the row: one, two, three, four; one, two, three, four. Then he said, "Well, gentlemen and Mrs. Korth, it's been wonderful, and I have no more questions." I thought, Well, that was a piece of cake. And then he said, "However, Senator Sarbanes is coming and he needs to talk to Mrs. Korth more in depth." I thought, that's OK, I'm ready for it. I was ready. Both Senator Graham from Texas, who is a Republican and

Senator Lloyd Bentsen, who is a Democrat and now Secretary of the Treasury had come in to introduce me to the committee -- bipartisan support, both of my Texas senators, and I was ready. The press was there. Still, there had been some negative press about: Is she ready? Can she do it?

Q: Political appointees come and go, but women political appointees still -- I think it's still true today -- are even greater targets.

KORTH: Absolutely.

Q: It's unfair and all that, but it's still part of the ethos. It's changing, though.

KORTH: It's changing, but being around Washington, I knew -- I knew what I was up against, and I knew I had to prove myself and let the senators know I was serious. Leading up to the hearings, I called on as many senators on the Foreign Relations Subcommittee as possible, but Sarbanes was not accepting any appointments with people who were going to come before him. He was saving his ammunition for when he got there so I had not called on Senator Sarbanes. And he came in and he's a gentleman and a scholar, and he began to ask the four of us questions again. And then there was just three of us, and then two of us, and then I noticed it was 'Mrs. Korth, Mrs. Korth, Mrs. Korth.' I was doing fine. And he reached down and he had a book, and he picked up this book, and he said, "Mrs. Korth, this is a book written by Foreign Service ambassadors, some of whom are the brightest minds in this country, some of whom were political appointees. Before you go to this post, could I recommend that you read this from cover to cover." And he was being very firm. And I looked up at him and said, "Senator, would that be the book called" -- and I can't recall the name --

Q: "This Worked For Me"?

KORTH: No, that's just what to do when you get to post. This is something that has the pros and cons of political appointees and Foreign Service appointees. And I said, "You know, Senator, as a matter of fact, I have read that book. Ambassador Gerard Smith lives across the street, and there's an article in it by him. Ambassador George McGhee who is also a friend -- there's an article in it by him. You know, I agree with a lot of points in that book." There was stone silence in that room, and Senator Sarbanes said, "You've read this book?" and I said, "Yes, Sir. I have." I really think, that at that moment, that is what sealed my fate. He knew that not only had I learned about Mauritius, but I had worked within the Department, and he went on -- he had run out of questions, but his staff kept handing him questions on pieces of paper over his shoulder. He, at this point now, was ignoring the other three Foreign Service officers. They were fine, they were career. Finally, toward the end, he said, "Now, you do know, Mrs. Korth, that there have been some assassination attempts on the Prime Minister of Mauritius?" I said, "Yes, sir. Two, to be exact." And he said, "Do you know who they were?" And I said, "Well, sir, I know that one was a Hindu and one was a Muslim, and I know that the weapon of choice in one instance was a knife." And he said, "Do you know precisely that one was a Hindu?" And I said, "No, sir, but I can check on that

for you." And he said, "Young lady, you'd better do some more homework." And this was the only thing in the whole hearing he found fault with. And this was after two hours. And I said, "I'll be happy to, Senator." And that was it. And, of course, what went into the papers was "Senator Sarbanes Thinks Mrs. Korth Should Do More Homework." And then what you do, you submit written answers, and we found out right away that, Yes, I was right. I wasn't sure, but I had given the right answer, and very shortly after that, it went through.

Q: I love capturing these little vignettes, because it shows how the system works.

KORTH: Let me make a footnote to that. The footnote to my hearing was that the very next week there was the hearing of a political appointee, of a woman, and my husband went to the hearing. He said, "I want to go and see if they treat her the same way, if, in fact, what they have done is target women appointees." And he came back, and he called me from a pay phone, and he said, "You're not going to have any trouble." I said, "Don't tell me that. We don't know, the committee hasn't voted." And he said, "Let me tell you what happened: in the hearing, Senator Sarbanes said to the second woman appointee, 'Have you read this book? You would be well-served if you read this book.' He said the same thing to this woman he said to you. And she said to the Senator, 'I'm sorry, Sir, I haven't heard of it, but I'll be glad to read it.' And he said, 'If you were like Mrs. Korth, you would have done your homework -- you would have read this book.'" And my husband said, "If he used you as an example, I feel certain you'll get through."

Q: You mentioned your husband there. How did your husband feel about going to a post with you?

KORTH: I think, probably, like any spouse would, male or female, about an assignment that's a long way away, that's a whole new world, that certainly brings new dimensions to the family and to the marriage -- probably with mixed emotions. At that point, when we made the decision, we knew he would not live in Mauritius, he would not live at post with me. He came to post with me to present credentials, he came back a month later. He made thirteen trips to Mauritius, which is 10,000 miles and a two-day trip -- coming and going -- during the time I was there, and of course, I was back in Washington about twice a year.

Q: He's a lawyer?

KORTH: He's an attorney, practices law with his father, which he continues to do. It was a hardship, in a way, and yet, in another way, it was such an incredible experience -- for me, as a woman and an individual, and for my children who are now twenty-seven, twenty-five, and twenty. They were able to come to the Indian Ocean, which is an area of the world our family had not traveled in before. They were able to go on to South Africa, Kenya -- they did extensive travel in Europe. It was just a wonderful, broadening experience for our whole family, not just for me.

Q: Did you go to the ambassadorial seminar?

KORTH: Absolutely.

Q: I've interviewed Brandon Grove, who was head of it, and Tony Motley

KORTH: Those were my two leaders.

Q: For the historical note, this was started by Shirley Temple Black -- this was her brainchild. How did you find it?

KORTH: Very enlightening. There's something about being in the same boat with new ambassadors. And in this instance, and for the record, there were people in our class who had been ambassadors before. It's a refresher course for them. I thought it was wonderful. You're going to post, they're going to post, and I can tell you also, for the record, a fellow named Jim Cheek, a wonderful Foreign Service officer -- he's now gone off to be Ambassador to Argentina.

Q: I was on his promotion panel one time.

KORTH: And Johnny Brown -- wonderful people -- Bill Swing. These men tucked me under their wing and said, "Look: this is how it's done, and furthermore, let me tell you this... "

Q: You didn't find a career or non-career atmosphere?

KORTH: I didn't, because from the word Go, I loved it. I knew I was going to love it, I knew that it would come to an end, and I feel very strongly about living every single day to its absolute fullest. To me, it was a privilege, suddenly, to know these Foreign Service officers, other ambassadors, to be in that really very small club in this world that shapes foreign policy. Or if it doesn't shape foreign policy, spreads the foreign policy of our President or our Secretary of State. A spokesman for your country -- it's a very humbling experience.

Q: Oh, yes. In this era we're talking about, and God knows how long it will last, the United States is the most powerful country and the Ambassador is the spokesman. When you went out to Mauritius, did you have any self-imposed instructions? Most ambassadors, going out, say, "These are the major problems, these are the ones I'm going to try to deal with." Did you have any set of priorities?

KORTH: Lots of priorities! We had the sugar quota, which is an on-going thing. It was there before I came, it's a problem since I left. There is an ongoing and probably not-solvable though resolvable problem with Diego Garcia and the sovereignty issue with Great Britain, and Diego Garcia and Mauritius and the United States -- it's a triangle, almost like the Bermuda Triangle, because every overture that tries to solve it sinks. So this was something I wanted to make better, or at least, ease tensions between the government of Mauritius and the government of Great Britain. There was also, Mr. Kennedy, the fact

that I was the first woman in the history of Mauritius to be appointed Ambassador. So I was dealing with a new job, and they were dealing with a whole new breed of cat, if you will, in a woman. Bear in mind that Mauritius is almost seventy percent Indian, and the breakdown in that is two-thirds/one-third Hindu-Muslim. So, again, like the challenge of even completing the nomination and going through the process with the Foreign Relations Committee, I had to prove to the government of Mauritius that I was a serious ambassador, that a woman could do the job -- although in Mauritius, women's rights are light-years behind America and many other countries. So to be taken seriously -- it was self-imposed, as you say, the assignment: to let them know I was serious about America, that I was serious about doing good things for Mauritian-American relations. President Bush had given me the mandate. He said, "We don't know a lot about Mauritius. Go out there, find out about it, raise a profile."

Q: You did go out, of course, with that one great advantage, that some political ambassadors have, but a great many don't have, and that is, a friendship with the President. Many come because they are recommended by somebody and there really isn't a Presidential connection. But you had that, and I imagine that was something you could use.

KORTH: But you don't use that. It goes back to what you asked me about the State Department and the Foreign Service. The President is President of all America and deals with the whole world. He sent me to Mauritius to be his representative there. So I was working through channels as much as possible, with the State Department or the Defense Department or with all these other agencies that are so key to ambassadorial jobs. Now, obviously, I knew there was a possibility that if I needed to do something, the contacts were in place. But that is not how I wanted to run my post. I wasn't there to have a vacation: I was there to do serious business.

Q: Let's talk about the Embassy and how you found it, your impression of how it ran and how you worked with it, and then we'll talk about some of the issues. Could you talk about the Embassy.

KORTH: The Embassy, when I got there, was in a bit of difficulty. Not having anything to do with the former Ambassador, but with the way the terms were set for the officers who were there. Two had just left and the third major officer was leaving, so there had been a hundred percent turnover. My DCM went out six weeks ahead of me to get heads up and a little overlap with Ambassador Ronald Palmer who was there before me, but Ambassador Palmer had left, the Political Officer had left, the ECON Officer had left, and six weeks after I got there, the Admin Officer was leaving. So I found myself with all these balls in the air and so much change, trying to get my feet on the ground and establish it as my Embassy. You know that one of my least favorite things as Ambassador is "we have always done it this way." To me, it's just a red flag. I'm sure it's always been done a certain way with the previous Ambassador, and who follows me will do it their way. So I felt it was incumbent on me to put my stamp on the Embassy immediately -- acceptance as much by the people of Mauritius as I needed right there in the walls of the Embassy. In Mauritius, the people who work for you, the Mauritian side of the office, are the most incredible people -- the FSNs

[Foreign Service Nationals] have been there, most of them, ten-fifteen-twenty years. They are so good. It is something that -- if any Ambassador fails to recognize and doesn't use as a resource -- it just doesn't make sense.

Q: There is a tendency today to say, Why don't we hire Americans in these positions?

KORTH: Well, this is important. You have to cut this baby in two. Mauritius is a very small post. We only have one secretary that the DCM and the Ambassador share. We needed a second person and it took us a long time to get the OK to hire spouses, to hire an American secretary, because of clearances. Just to bring my staff up to speed, to be accepted by them, to let them know this was not just a pretty face that knew the President -- this was the problem.

Q: I'm sure. There is a judging period that goes on. Who was your DCM and how did he or she work out?

KORTH: My DCM was a she, Susan Johnson, a Foreign Service officer, who is a fabulous, bright, intelligent woman, who -- again, like Walt Manger -- was a sounding board at all moments. When Susan left, after almost two years, another Foreign Service officer, David Dunn who had been in Burundi as DCM, and before that, in Paris, came to Mauritius, and -- what can I tell you? It was Ying and Yang, Cheech and Chong! It just became the most wonderful partnership. So that in my last bit of time in Mauritius, then I had my wings, the training wheels were off. David and I were able to accomplish so many things, and he was such a great support. He is still there now, as charge. After three years, all these positions I'm talking about, that had been in flux when I got there -- they had all come in while I was Ambassador. It, in fact, was my team and they, in fact, were my family, because, as we discussed earlier, I was at post alone. It became the Embassy family. It was not that when I got there.

It was very important to me that everyone pull together in the same direction. Not only the people who were sent from Washington, but our FSNs and our Marines. The Marine situation was back-and-forth, back-and-forth -- whether the Marines were going to be left in Mauritius, whether they would be recalled. Right in the middle of my tenure we had the Gulf War -- it was very important that they were a presence there. Now, they are not there, as you well know, to protect the Ambassador. They are there to protect the Embassy, to protect our classified information. Their presence was important during that very tense time. The Muslim population in Mauritius was very anti-American -- that became a problem. But in the meantime, we had a visit to Washington. President Bush could not get to Mauritius. He had tried to come to South Africa-Mauritius, make a swing in our part of the world, but it didn't happen. He did invite the Prime Minister of Mauritius to come for a working visit, a three-day visit, and bring whatever delegation.

I went to the Prime Minister and said, "I'm so excited -- I'm so thrilled that the President has invited you and your Ministers," and suggested to him that because of what Mauritius is and does -- their democratization is really one of the first in the African area. They have

something called an Export Processing Zone. There are almost six hundred companies there, because it was a former British Commonwealth, they still have access to the EC. So what Mauritius is really all about, other than being multi-racial and democratic with a British parliamentary system, is -- these are people who have come up by their own bootstraps, they realized things were difficult -- these are people who wake up in the morning and have yet another idea for trade, for business. And I said, "Mr. Prime Minister, you have got to take a delegation from the private sector to Washington. What we want to do is paint a whole picture for America and for the Administration about Mauritius. All countries have governments, but not all countries have this incredible get-up-and-go, and Export Processing Zone, and let's tap into these people and take that kind of delegation with us." So we did, and we were seventeen, finally, when we left Mauritius. They went through Atlanta and visited the Martin Luther King Memorial, the Olympic's site -- they're very involved with Olympics and sports in Mauritius -- and we went to Atlanta on a government plane, because that's the way the State Department operates. About a third of the way to Washington, Bill Black, who was Chief of Protocol, came back and said, "Ambassador, you know we're so pleased to have you, and we're looking forward to having you, but do you know what plane you are on?" And I said, "Air Force -- whatever it is, and we certainly appreciate the ride and the proper entry." And he said, "No, no. What you need to know and what you need to share with the Prime Minister and his wife and the gentlemen with him is that this is President Kennedy's airplane."

Well, I'm telling you -- it just was so extraordinary to me, and then to be able to pass that information to the Prime Minister. Because, here I was, Ambassador for the first time, a gal from Waco, Texas, who lived in Washington -- and remember, I told you earlier, waiting for that very plane to come in, almost thirty years before -- to then find myself on the plane that took the body of the President back to Washington, and now bringing to Washington the Prime Minister to a President that I loved and admired. To me, it was probably the most moving thing that happened during my tenure. Even to the Prime Minister and his ministers -- to this day, Mr. Kennedy, no matter where you go in this world, foreigners want to know about President Kennedy. "Did you know him, did you meet him, will it ever be the same?" It has nothing to do with Republicans and Democrats, it's not a partisan question, but it's always one of the first questions. So that was a highlight of my tenure as Ambassador.

Q: Among the issues, you mentioned Diego Garcia. Could you explain what the problem was, how you worked with it?

KORTH: The problem with Diego Garcia started probably in 1968, or perhaps a few years before. Mauritius got its independence from Great Britain, although they remained in the Commonwealth, in 1968. Just prior to their independence, Ambassador David Bruce was our Ambassador to London. As they were working on the papers for independence, the delegation from Mauritius would go up, the delegation from the United States would come over, and spoke with Ambassador Bruce. They wrote a treaty, a fifty-year treaty that will expire in the year 2016, giving Mauritius its independence, but withholding the island of Diego Garcia from the Chagos Archipelago and having Great Britain keep its sovereignty over the island of Diego Garcia. Now where America fits into this equation: it was given, at

the same time, a fifty-year lease to put a very strategic military base on Diego Garcia. So the treaty was written, was ratified in March 1968, and Mauritius was given its independence, holding out this island. We're not talking next door -- this is an island that's over a thousand miles away from Mauritius, in the middle of the Indian Ocean, but a very key military base.

Now, for years, it was a secretive sort of thing. The Defense Department didn't want to talk about it, the State Department didn't want to talk about it. Everything was secret. What I found when I got there was that the Mauritians didn't understand what was going on, on the island of Diego. Well, it was top-secret and even you and I can't discuss what the policy is. But further, almost the first two weeks I was in Mauritius, the military head of Diego Garcia was paying a call on his counterparts in the Mauritian government, and he paid a courtesy call on me as the new Ambassador. He came in and said, "How do you do, Ambassador Korth." There I was, remember, ten thousand miles from anybody, and he had an accent that sounded like mine! I said, "Commander, Sir, where are you from?" And he said, "I'm from Itta Bena, Mississippi." And I said, "I was born in Mississippi!" And he said, "Ambassador!" And there was an immediate connection. And he said, "I'd like to invite you to Diego Garcia." I said, "Can you do that?" And he said, "Of course, I can, I'm in charge." "And I said, "Can I come if you invite me?" And he said, "If you get your clearances. No ambassador has visited there in years and years." So immediately, I spoke with my DCM, and it took the Pentagon, the Defense Department, the NSC, the White House, and one other, to sign off and say, Yes, you can visit this military base.

As we got into this process, which took a bit of doing and a little time, I had gotten to know the British High Commissioner well, and established a wonderful rapport. Mauritius is small; the Diplomatic Corps is thirteen. I said, "Listen, you're taking heat, your country is, America is -- we want to keep it on an even keel with the Mauritians -- why don't you come with me. You call your Government and see if this can be a joint effort, not to tell any secrets, but to demystify what is going on on Diego Garcia. If the Prime Minister is going to come to me and say, What is going on, and if Prime Minister-then Thatcher is going to say, We can't give back the island -- that's the issue now: the Mauritians want the island to be given back to them as part of their territory. So the British High Commissioner and I went to Diego Garcia and were able to see exactly what is going on. Much of it is classified. So we were able to go back, and one of the questions in the press on Mauritius was: We Know that there are 300,000 soldiers on that island. I was able to say, "But there are not 300,000 soldiers on the island. There are a couple of thousand." Diego is a re-supplying base. Ships come in, merchant marine ships come in, and then they do classified things. But we were able to put to rest a little bit of the "What is so scary up there?" That, on the other hand, has been an ongoing problem. The treaty will be up in 2016. Now the Mauritians are working on a plan, which hopefully will go through, which is: what happens in 2016. The Treaty is written as though, and as such, that when it gets to the year 2016, the British and the Americans will look at the necessity for the base again, and will then determine whether to extend the Treaty or to return the territory. This is the sticking point now. I think that, under the good auspices of all three countries, something will be worked out. It became, less than a year later, a very key installation for the US government, during the Gulf War.

Q: We're talking about the Gulf War, between the United States, many other powers, and Iraq in 1991. Iraq invaded Kuwait in August of 1990.

KORTH: The first B-52s --

Q: Those are the heavy bombers.

KORTH: -- that were allowed to go over the territory, came from Diego Garcia. That was in the news. So it made the Mauritians realize that it is a very serious operation that goes on there. They, in fact, were shielded by Diego Garcia, because that was what was between the island of Mauritius and the Gulf War. So the issue quieted down for a bit. I think where some of the misunderstanding came was from the Seychelles, where our government has listening posts. For the public record, the American government pays a fee to the government of the Seychelles. The American government does not pay a fee, either to the government of Mauritius or the government of Great Britain, for use of Diego Garcia. That was part of the misunderstanding. The Mauritians, I think, felt that if the Seychelles were getting money for that, why wasn't Mauritius getting money for having the military there. Those fears have been, I think, allayed in the last couple of years, but still, the Treaty is in place, there's still a claim of sovereignty, and there's still a threat of possibly taking it to the United Nations and having the United Nations resolve a territorial dispute -- which can be done.

Q: You were there during the Gulf War in 1991. How did this play there? You did have one-third of the population Muslim, and Iraq was making a great play for the Muslim fundamentalists -- although we had far more Muslim countries on our side than the Iraqis did. How did that play out?

KORTH: There's a very interesting vignette. In June of 1991, we were here -- we, the Prime Minister and his delegation visiting the White House. After the official things, the meetings in the Oval Office with the Prime Minister, the meeting in the Cabinet Room with the two delegations, President Bush had a lunch for sixteen -- eight of the American delegation and eight of the Mauritians. And of all the people around the table -- you know President Bush is a very gregarious person, a very easy person to talk to -- there was one Muslim Minister. This was in June and the war had just ended in February/March. We were then here as a delegation, I, leading the American part. The President fell on a dialogue with the Minister, the only Muslim Minister in the Cabinet, and they talked and talked about what it meant to be Muslim, how his people had reacted. Due to this friendship -- I should tell you that this particular Minister later went on to be the President of Mauritius, and became a very close friend of mine. But during the Gulf War, the way that translated was -- when word reached Washington that the Muslims were going to come in front of the American Embassy, going to demonstrate, going possibly to be violent -- this particular Minister, Cassam Uteem, who is now President of Mauritius, went to the mosque and spoke with the Imam and spoke with the people there who were willing to march on our Embassy, and said, "Do not do it. This Ambassador is a friend of this country. America is a friend of Mauritius, and we do not

need violence." And there, on the spot, because of the friendship with the President, because of the trip, the march did not take place.

Q: It's very touching, and of course, this is the importance of these contacts.

KORTH: I will tell you that my brand of diplomacy, as someone told me, "Penne, it's hug diplomacy with you." But it's very personal. And Mauritius was small enough that I could get my arms around, not only the Embassy, but the Ministers, on a one-to-one basis. They're amazingly available, whether it's the Minister of Agriculture to discuss sugar quotas, or the Minister of Industry to discuss textiles, or the Health Minister to discuss programs for children or women. If I needed to see them, I was there in twenty minutes, and it was the same with the Prime Minister. It was as though no one had ever given them quite as much attention and it worked, based on really personal friendships that developed from constant calling on one another, back and forth. They were welcome in the American Embassy, any time they wanted to be there. The door was always, literally, open. We didn't close the door to the Embassy, to the Ambassador's office. Those sorts of things work. And so when a crunch came, like when the Minister went himself and said, "Do not go to the American Embassy, these are our friends and our relations have never been better. Don't spoil it. Your point is well-taken, that you don't like what is going on in the Gulf. But we don't want violence." He's a very peaceful man, this man, Cassam Uteem, a wonderful man. And it was over before it started.

Q: You mentioned the sugar quota as a major issue. What was the problem and how was it resolved?

KORTH: It hasn't resolved itself, because part of the problem with sugar all over the world -- the Caribbean basin -- they get preferential treatment for their sugar. Mauritius in years gone by has been known as 'Sugar Island.' It was, and remains, more or less, an underpinning of the economy. In the last twenty years, they've taken off from sugar and gone to high-dollar tourism, and as I explained earlier, this Export Processing Zone, so you've got a triangle. Still, sugar is what employs the most people; all cane is cut by hand because it's a volcanic island and you can't put a tractor or cutter in. It's a machete, piece by piece.

So the sugar quota is extremely important to Mauritians and the whole economy. And it goes up and down with the whims of Washington about whether the Caribbean gets it, the South American thing. And then we had NAFTA [North America Treaty Agreement] just as I was leaving and they became really alarmed. So that became a new issue in another direction. Sugar is important and they have a sugar lobby here. I should tell you that just before I went out to Mauritius, I went to a dinner with former Secretary of the Treasury John Connally, from Texas, and he had as his guest that evening Senator Russell Long of Louisiana -- a lot of, lot of sugar -- Mister Sugar. And he called me aside and the Senator put his arm around me and said, "Young lady, I need to talk to you for a minute." I said, "Yes, sir. Yes, sir," like a good Southern girl. And he said, "Don't you be going over there where all that sugar is and tryin' to undo my sugar quota. President Johnson and I wrote that

as tight as we could, twenty years ago, and don't you go there and mess with it." "Yes sir, Senator Long." So American sugar is probably one of the more complex issues, because it cuts across economy, trade, agriculture. It touches everything. And it's extremely political. But it's a very important issue for our country. And then you are sent as your country's ambassador to a country where it's an extremely important political-agricultural-economic issue for them, and you just have to do your best to make the two sides at least see each other's point of view.

Q: Did you change anything?

KORTH: I didn't mess with Senator Long's sugar quota. But we did our best to keep that on a status quo, and we did work a bit on the textile quote. Because there's a vast amount of exports coming out of Mauritius. It's the third largest exporter of wool knitwear in the world. The wool comes from somewhere else and it's spun into shirts and sweaters and all of that. A lot of it comes from Australia, a bit from India. So there were inroads to be made in another direction that could satisfy Senator Long's admonition to leave his sugar program along, not endangering American industry. Because so much of Mauritius' things went in other places, things such as Status and Adrienne Vittadini, Ralph Lauren Polo, things that your wife or your children wear.

Q: We're talking about knitwear companies.

KORTH: There was room for a little bit of movement there. So what I tried to do, in order to help the Mauritians and also, while not endangering American industry, was to see if we couldn't work out some sort of compromise on imports and exports.

Q: Did tourists impact on you or were these mainly tourists from elsewhere -- the protection and welfare of one's citizens abroad, particularly when they are off having a good time, can be a pain in the neck.

KORTH: There were not that many American tourists. Mauritius -- I will say, not only in the Foreign Service, where you come from, but in the American tourist segment, people who take far-flung vacations -- this is probably the best-kept secret in the world. It is, without a doubt, one of the most beautiful spots on the face of this earth. Mark Twain went there over a hundred years ago, and said in a famous quote, "You gather that God made Mauritius, and then modeled Heaven after it." And it is that beautiful. It is a tourist spot for primarily Europeans and South Africans. To a lesser extent, the Indians and Japanese. But it is a great, glorious, beautiful piece of this earth.

Q: You said that the majority of the population are of Indian stock. We've had -- one can only say -- a troubled relationship with India since Independence in 1948. Did any of that spill over -- Indian leftist-neutralism, that sort of thing.

KORTH: From time to time -- there is the caste system in Mauritius. This is very obvious. There are the Tamils and the Brahmins -- these sorts of nuances factor into what Minister

will have what position, and who may or may not ever be Prime Minister. So Mauritius is extremely close with India, extremely close. Yes, the influence is strongly felt.

Q: India was -- the word is probably a little too strong -- but in foreign affairs, India was always taking an anti-American stance. In UN votes, did you find this a problem.

KORTH: A little bit, but Mauritius prides itself on being totally independent, and almost in every case, they would vote with the United States. So it wasn't really a problem, but I will tell you that, for instance, I went on a state visit to India, with the Indian High Commissioner's wife, whose honored guest was the Prime Minister's wife, and I was the only other person invited to go. The three of us went. And I think the most telling thing, as we were being met by maharajahs and all that sort of thing, was -- I said to the Prime Minister's wife, "Lady J., what a fabulous trip! It's all so beautiful! What is your feeling about how we are being treated?" And the remark that she made told me everything: she said, "I feel like I've come home." She's in her sari, her roots and her heritage are Indian. So there's a great, strong affinity, not the least of which is geographical. Mauritius is literally in the middle of the Indian Ocean, and three hours from South Africa -- almost that far from Madagascar, three hours from Seychelles, and almost six hours from Bombay. In a neighborhood where distances mean absolutely nothing, this makes sense to me.

Q: Were there any political upheavals on Mauritius while you were there?

KORTH: There really were not. Mauritius is a polyglot. You cannot imagine that there are -- that's why the State Department uses it as an example. Because what we've talked about so far, you and I, the Hindus and the Muslims -- beyond that, you have a population that is two or three percent Chinese, two or three percent Franco-Mauritian -- the French who were the first sugar settlers there came, and with them brought people from Madagascar who now are the creole population. When the French lost Mauritius to the British in the Napoleonic Wars, the British then came in and freed all these people who worked in the cane fields. Slavery became no more. The British then brought in indentured servants, the Indians. That is why we've got in Mauritius this huge Indian population. There wasn't an indigenous group there. The Arabs came in the sixteen-hundreds, the French then came with the Dutch, but the French were the first people who settled there, with the sugar business, and they brought in the slaves from Madagascar, and then it was turned over to the British.

But the thing that is so fascinating is that, even though the French lost Mauritius in this one naval battle right off the coast, they never changed the Napoleonic Code -- it's still French, the language is still French or Creole, and the culture remains, certainly for the Christian part, primarily Catholic, French, French food. And now you have this wonderful mix of Creole food, Indian food, French food, Chinese -- wonderful Chinese who come from mainland China. Because if you think about all the ships -- they came around the Cape of Africa and headed off, maybe for the Far East, and they reprovisioned in Mauritius. And the same thing, coming from the Far East, trying to get in our direction

Q: Ambassadors are always having to trot up to the Foreign Minister of a country and say, "Look, we have this issue, these UN votes," and sometimes these are issues a country has no interest in at all. How did you work this?

KORTH: I did it as all ambassadors do. When it was time to go and make a demarche on whatever the subject was, that's simply what I did.

Q: Did you find it had some effect?

KORTH: Absolutely. The biggest demarche, and really the first one I made, was to keep this issue over Diego Garcia from going into the UN.

Q: That can turn into a very political thing that has nothing to do with the issues at hand.

KORTH: Absolutely. But it was sort of my first victory. In fact, Walt Manger was still the desk officer. I wrote a cable, I suppose, not particularly like Foreign Service people write them, and the first word in it was Hallelujah! They still tease me about the Hallelujah cable from Mauritius.

Q: It catches peoples' attention.

KORTH: But, Hallelujah! was really how I felt, because it was the hot issue when I first came, and it was the first demarche, and it worked.

Q: What was the argument? Why did they accede to that?

KORTH: As a Foreign Service officer, there's no way to imagine what finally turned it. You like to think it was a combination of your government or your expertise, or your silver tongue telling them could they just wait, I'm a new ambassador -- we'll work with you, just let us -- don't do it yet -- could I buy some time and see what will work --

Q: Well, Madame Ambassador, looking back on it, how do you feel about this whole experience?

KORTH: I have to tell you, from a professional point of view and a personal point of view, it was the three happiest years of my life. Because I felt like, when I left there, I had made a difference. I had made a difference for our country, I had grown immeasurably as a human being, I hope I made the State Department proud, I know I made the President proud -- he said so, and Secretary Baker. So it all just came together, and I think the telling thing -- the night before I left, after three years of official entertaining back and forth which all ambassadors must do, the Prime Minister invited me for dinner. And his guests were his wife, his children and his grandchildren, and my DCM. And he said in his toast at dinner, "I want you always to remember America this way, in the form of Ambassador Korth, who came here, who cared. We have had better relations with our country and America." He put that in a letter to President Bush.

End of interview