

Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR CYNTHIA S. PERRY

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 21st of March, 1999. This is an interview with Ambassador Cynthia Shepard Perry. This is being done in Houston, Texas on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. To begin with would you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

PERRY: I was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, November 11, 1928.

Q: The year of the dragon?

PERRY: Yes. I was one of nine children, but not the middle child. I was the fifth in line. There were 5 girls and 4 boys.

Q: What about your father and mother?

PERRY: Well, they were primarily farmers. My mother loved gardening, had a special knack for growing peonies and other flowering shrubs. I guess I inherited that from her, and so have my sons. My father was an amateur artist and was extremely fond of music and art.

Q: I noticed your paintings?

PERRY: Yes, I'm very much into art and to music. Dad taught me to play the piano and then after I learned, he stopped playing. The same way with the art. He taught me how to paint and then he stopped painting. But his big thrill in life was breeding and training hunting dogs, especially bird dogs, but also for hunting wild game, such as raccoons and opossums. People would come from long distances to buy the dogs from him or to have their own dogs trained. He was a great trainer. Two things that I remember he did for me with regard to the dogs: I wanted a good piano so badly, and he sold one of his best hunting dogs for the piano of my choice. Then, when I was a member of my high school marching band, I asked him for my own clarinet instead of using one owned by the school. He traded another of his best dogs and bought the clarinet. He was very supportive of the arts in my life.

An interesting story perhaps: my father served in France during World War I and even though war was not a happy situation, he loved what he learned about France which I'm sure was passed on to me. The Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918 (the 11th day, of the 11th month at 11:00 a.m.). Ten years after he returned from the war, I was born on that same date and hour. He used to tell me how special I was because of my birth date which he felt was a talisman - that I was destined for greatness. In fact, each Armistice Day, he would take me to the celebrations and parades. And, he would tell me the planes flying overhead dipping their wings were in celebration of my birthday. I was in the first or second grade before I learned the true significance of the day. But, it was indeed my birthday, too.

Q: What type of farming was your family involved in?

PERRY: We had just had a few acres in Indiana--I guess you would say cottage or subsistence farming. We always had plenty to eat and a surplus to help our neighbors. We were considered, like our neighbors, to be poor dirt farmers. I suppose, in those years following the Great Depression, everyone suffered greatly from a life of deprivation.

Q: How did you find yourself as the middle child in this big family? Did everyone sort of work on the farm and do various things?

PERRY: We all had to work the farm to survive. I was too young to understand the

depression when it was occurring. I guess my earliest memories of those days are of President Roosevelt and notices of his death broadcast over our small battery radio. I remember the sadness that filled our household. But we worked only because we had to, not because we loved doing. I was no exception. How could anyone love it, although my mother worked so hard at maintaining the garden and her beloved flowers, that I thought she must love to work. I find myself doing the same thing, working with the help of gardeners, but digging and puttering all the same.

Q: Of course, many of us who went through the depression didn't understand what was going on. If you were a small child, you thought that was just life. One moved along. What about schooling? Where did you go to school and what interested you most in school?

PERRY: My first six years of schooling were in a one-room schoolhouse, a segregated school in Burnett, Indiana. We had a marvelous teacher. She taught all six grades. When you got to the sixth grade, you were integrated into the township junior high school. I was well prepared for that level, having had more or less a personal tutor. So I graduated from Otter Creek High School in North Terre Haute, in 1946, and went from there to Indiana State University in Terre Haute.

Q: Well, one of the things about the one room schoolhouse was that in essence you were moving up and down grade level because you couldn't help but hear other things being taught.

PERRY: That's right, I've always been grateful for that, and open to learning from all that goes on around me, in the close environs. That classroom was far ahead of its time, an integrated type of learning, everything at one time, that many of our modern schools are now trying to mimic. There was great excitement from learning new things and competing with those older than I was, to show I could master subjects they found difficult.

Q: Then you heard facts and figures, dates, places and things again and again?

PERRY: Yes, a progression of things. There were lessons learned never to be forgotten throughout my life. I remember that our teacher, Mrs. Love, cried on the day we finished sixth grade, saying the three of us were now going out into the world from which she more or less had protected us from for six years. I couldn't imagine then what she meant. When I entered high school, my knowledge of art and my artistic ability saved me from the humdrum and possible snobbery that the other black kids suffered. Not another kid in the whole school could sketch or paint like me; so I was always included in the highly academic stream, which unfortunately separated me from the handful of black students. They considered me a snob, for no reason I deserved. Then my music and the writing further distinguished me. I was always at the top of any writing class, and won all the essay competitions in the area.

Q: Was there, I'm just not familiar with Indiana and I guess there's a Southern Indiana

and a Northern Indiana and was there much of an African American community where you were?

PERRY: No, no, the large black communities settled around in the steel mills where they could find good-paying jobs--up around Gary, Chicago, Michigan City. Terre Haute is a university town and I think the black population represented something like 2% of the population in that city. I grew up in a very tight small black community, called Lost Creek, with its own history, values and traditions. I grew up knowing I was not white and privileged, but not essentially different from whites. We were all exposed to the same things, but sometimes separately with special seating, like the cinemas, for example. There were always times when you were confronted with racial discrimination, where you least expected it, like eating places. It was always a very traumatic experience to be told, "Sorry, we cannot serve you here."

Q: I would imagine it would be particularly difficult for people growing up in the South and all that, I mean I know as a Counselor Officer. I sent many immigrants from Yugoslavia and to Gary. I would not have expected such racial division in the North.

PERRY: Southern Indiana was Ku Klux country, the home of the Imperial Wizard, their leader. Life at that time in Indiana wasn't that much different from the South. But because we had such small numbers of minorities, there weren't as many spiteful and hateful incidents as in other parts of the State.

Q: What about in high school, obviously art and music, when you say writing, what were you doing in writing?

PERRY: Well, there were always special essays and essay contests sponsored by different organizations throughout the State of Indiana, as well as within Vigo County and the townships. They were usually on historical issues and social sciences subjects, sometimes on current events. I always loved political science, then called government. We called it civics I believe. So I was a top student and did my writing and I won all of the contests not just for the content but for the preciseness of the language used and the penmanship. These papers were handwritten and I would invariably win first prize.

Q: What kind of reading were you doing?

PERRY: Everything. Books that kids don't read these days, many of the Shakespearean classics, for example, Edgar Allen Poe, and others. We were assigned individual reading for class discussion. We also had to memorize and recite poetry, of course, Walt Whitman, Shelley, Byron and Browning. Even now I remember the words of the Songs of Hiawatha. Sometimes I remember something - a word, a phrase - so very clearly, and in searching for it, find I first learned it in those early years. It was in those days, those early days, even though mine was what you call a rural high school, that so much basic knowledge was gained. Our high school had the same curricula as other major schools in the area and we learned everything that was necessary for us to know to enter university.

Q: And there were demands?

PERRY: Oh, absolutely, coming from all corners. The demand for excellence came primarily from the strong, black community, from my parents and their parents, from our friends and neighbors. It was encouraged by the teachers and the schools I attended. Two of my elder brothers were excellent students and athletes. Of course, everyone expected me to excel like them. One brother, James, was a straight A student going through that school and he was also an exceptional athlete. I can remember that my younger brother, Orville, resented the comparisons being made, since he was “born” not liking any of those things. He didn't like going to school, he had no intention of sitting in his seat. My father was very embarrassed by his behavior, often saying emphatically: "Well, you've got to." So I followed in my elder brothers' footsteps, academically, although I must say I didn't like sweating and the community showers and was never good at sports.

Q: What about World War II? How much of an influence was that on you as far as reading about it?

PERRY: My four brothers were all in the service. I learned a lot about what was going on around the country and in the world from them and from their letters. One was a career officer, and was assigned to army bases outside this country. I learned about geography from keeping up with my brothers' assignments. One was an outstanding Marine, and his letters were full of war and battle, which he loved, but it worried my parents, not matter how proud of him they were. I remember that Mom had a flag hanging in the window, like other parents, with four stars, representing her contribution to the war effort. None of them were lost in the war. My father was greatly affected because he had been through the first World War and hated to see his boys go off to the second World War which he thought would never happen again. But life for me, reality began after World War II. I was deeply affected by the radio broadcasts, the warmongering, and movies, such as *The Purple Heart*, designed to create deep hatred for the “Japs” and the Germans. This was the time that I began to watch the activities of Eleanor Roosevelt as they were reported, in her work toward peaceful negotiation through a world body she helped to create: the United Nations. I graduated from high school in 1946 you see, and married that same year, a war veteran 13 years my senior. He'd also served abroad in France, Germany, and England and had a broad perspective of what life was outside of the States, which also greatly influenced my thinking on other worlds.

Q: Had you read books of adventure? Many of the people were reading books like Richard Haliburton sort of adventure things - you know, novels or something of foreign events. I'm trying to get a feel for your perspective of foreign things because that's why we are here talking?

PERRY: Well, adventure, yes, but more like Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, boy adventures, and not for the most part things with which I could identify. I read stories about Amelia Earhart, which were exciting and adventurous, but I didn't aspire to flying. I read them without a sense of how these things might apply to me. But, I was a student of geography, and was inspired to learn about the location of places and things around the

world. I learned early to read maps - I had no idea I would some day see the Seven Wonders of the World, and the many others that followed. But, I marveled and dreamed about them. The greater direct influence on my life's perspectives came after graduation.

While I was in high school, I had often said to my counselor, who was then also the Principal of the high school that I wanted to do something great with my life, like being ambassador. Later, as my knowledge grew, I became more specific: I wanted to be the U.S. Ambassador to Kenya. He asked me, "Why Kenya?" It was the only country in Africa I knew something about. During the period following the war when African nations began a push for their independence from the colonial powers, stories of the wars for independence filled the news, even in our little town. One daily newspaper that was heralding all these developments, with detailed coverage of the Mau Maus of Kenya, labeled them insurgents, terrorists, who were killing the British settlers out there. I considered them freedom fighters, quite courageous, who could perhaps find a better way to vet their determination to be free. This initial impetus for freedom, you might recall, spread like a fever across the African Continent. I recall making the determination that African nations would be independent some day, and I said to my high school advisor - although by that time, I was no longer in high school--that I would be U.S. Ambassador to Kenya. I felt that by the time I qualified to become one, Kenya was going to need a strong American presence and influence to become what they need to become politically and economically strong, to participate in the world forum and the world market.

When I told Mr. Lamb about this, he didn't laugh at me, but instead gave me advice on how to do it. By this time, some years had passed since I knew him at high school. I had married already and had two little children. He came by my house at my request and I said, "Look, I need your advice and help, because nothing seems to satisfying a certain urge within me. I feel I must go ahead with my original goal to become a U.S. Ambassador."

He said, "Okay, I'll lay it out for you, starting from scratch. You've got plenty to build on, but we must organize it to work toward your goal." I had been working toward a degree in art. He said, "That's a nice thing to have but you need to go back and do political science, then do a graduate degree in foreign language or English, then you go do a doctorate in something international. At that point, you can start talking about moving to Africa." I said, "Okay, I'll do it." And we laid out a 25-year plan of action.

Within the first ten years I was supposed to have completed everything through the doctorate; I completed Indiana State and went on to do a doctorate in International Education at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. I was to spend five years working in an international organization or a company (I went to IBM Corporation that had an office in my town). My plan called for five years working in Africa (I worked in Kenya and Ethiopia for more than five years with the UN until I completed the 25-year plan). I was to spend five years at a university doing research and so forth (I chose Texas Southern University at the latter end of that 25-year experience.). These experiences were not necessarily sequential. I completed some while doing others; e.g., while doing the doctorate, I was also working in Africa part time; while being a professor at Texas

Southern, I took a five-year leave of absence to work full time in Africa, before returning to my writing and research at TSU. I'm probably leaving out a whole lot here.

Q: Oh, we are coming back. I found your relationship with your advisor very interesting. Who was your advisor?

PERRY: His name was Herbert Lamb, the principal of the all-white junior high and high school, which I attended.

Q: How did he, coming from the middle of the Midwest, know how to advise you? Most people didn't even know what the foreign service or an ambassador was.

PERRY: I'm not sure that he knew all the procedures initially, but his field of expertise was government. He had taught us a lot about the various levels of public service. When I specified what I wanted to become, he asked me what was my incentive. I told him that about the classes he had taught about the value of service, public service, and how much I learned about my personal obligation to serve. He knew I was one of the top people in the class, but wasn't aware how deeply influenced I was. I gave him a copy of the newspaper item that had inspired me to begin moving toward a Foreign Service career.

I knew of no Black person - perhaps Ralph Bunche, who was later prominently featured in the news as the Secretary General of the United Nations--but I had no personal knowledge of a black person in the Foreign Service or one who knew anything at all about African countries. I thought as Black people in America we had not only a right but an obligation to help these nations as they sought to help themselves. He said, "Well, I have to go look this up and I'll come back and we'll talk about it again." When he came back he told me about the dual tracks that I could follow: either as a career officer or as an appointee of a sitting president. He suggested that I go as an appointee because I already had small children, I had a husband who wasn't about to move away from Terre Haute and he said, "You've got plenty of time, let's do the 25 years preparation."

I was quite happy to do that, because it placed the actual start of my career beyond my childbearing years. At that time all I could think of was the problems I would face with frequent pregnancies. If I were to have more children, when would I have time to pursue my dreams? At that time, my husband was insisting that I couldn't go back to school until the two children were in school - and then, perhaps I could also start to work. At the point the first two entered school, I became pregnant with the third one. Every time I had a big incentive to work or to return to school, I was faced with another pregnancy. I finally understood this was my husband's plan, so with the fourth one, who came along nine years after the third one, I enrolled in school pregnant, and finished my studies. This was at a time when women were rarely given that opportunity.

Q: Where did you go to undergraduate university?

PERRY: Indiana State University in Terre Haute, which made it easy for me to get to school and to get back home in time to care for my family.

Q: How did you find it as far as what you wanted to do? First you said you started with art? Was it hard to make the switch to political science?

PERRY: No it wasn't. Art is my first love - my passion, and no matter what else I have done, I have always maintained my painting, as you can see - even while serving as ambassador. Had I continued to study art, of course, I'm sure I would have perfected my techniques, and possible might have become a celebrated artist. But, it was not difficult to make the change - political science forced me to think critically, to expand my knowledge, to argue and defend my own political positions - it was intellectually demanding. Actually, my undergraduate degree provided me a broad base on which to build a career - perhaps high school was my best and most lasting introduction to critical thinking, but the rigorous courses at Indiana State solidified my resolve and launched my career.

Q: This is true for many of us.

PERRY: In my undergraduate program, I was older than the majority of other students. I had a purpose for being there beyond the fact that my mama said to go. So I could get to the top of my classes in that way. It was not a hard transition except the fact that my family responsibilities were heavy during that period and, then, I also began working with an investment firm in the city, which forced me to take classes in the evenings.

Q: This is Nichols Investment Company?

PERRY: Nichols Loan Company and Investment Corporation.

Q: How did you move into that field?

PERRY: That's interesting too. All of these things are very connected. I had a couple of angels riding on each shoulder, guiding me through all this stuff. It was the year that Eisenhower ran for the Presidency, his second term.

Q: That would be '56?

PERRY: Second term and at that point I became politically active. I was the Political Officer for the NAACP and we reviewed all of the racial and social problems that were going on at the time. I began to think critically about membership in a political party. This was on the advice of Mr. Lamb who had defined the career and political paths toward becoming an ambassador. Since I chose the political route, I had to choose a party and to be faithful to that party for a number of years. Now was the time to make that decision. On choice of party affiliation, he gave very simplistic advice - or perhaps prophetic vision, was: "Just look at the history of political parties and try to guess from one point in time to another, which party is likely to be in power in 25 years." I decided on the Republican Party after I had also fully investigated the local Democratic Party. Mr. Lamb was Presbyterian and Republican anyway, but he passed me on to a friend of his, George Nichols, who was the State Treasurer of the Republican Party and President of

Nichols Loan Company in Indiana. Mr. Nichols was also campaign chairman in opposition to the long-time Mayor of the City of Terre Haute, in office for 20 years, now running for Governor of the State of Indiana.

They succeeded in electing a Republican president, Dwight Eisenhower, and a republican Governor, which did not remove the Mayor from office, of course, but kept him from advancing up the ladder. I worked at Republican Party Headquarters during the campaign, after which Mr. Nichols hired me to work in his company. So, I worked for Nichols Loan and Investment for five years.

Q: With the NAACP or you personally was there any problem with Eisenhower at that time or during the time because of the Central High School in Little Rock and all? He was very reluctant to get involved in civil rights. It was just moving and Eisenhower came from a different era. It just wasn't his thing.

PERRY: Well, he was quite popular in Indiana, which was a Republican State. It's true that most Black people were Democrats, but Eisenhower was a war hero and had the strong support of veterans throughout the State. Traditionally and historically, black voters voted the Republican ticket, Lincoln's party. Voting preferences changed when President Roosevelt came into office, bringing a number of reforms that favored poor blacks and whites throughout the country. No, there was no great opposition to President Eisenhower that I can recall, or to the Republican Party. But, I was now a Black Republican, a rare thing indeed--still rare, as a matter of fact.

Q: Then you later joined IBM?

PERRY: Yes.

Q: First of all, when did you finish your college training?

PERRY: It took me a while. I was attending part-time while at Nichols Loan, and continued the night classes after joining IBM. In my second year at IBM, I took a three-semester leave of absence to complete the degree, since I had to spend my last 30 hours on campus. After graduation, in 1967, I returned to IBM to a higher level position as Educational Representative which sent me all around the country and throughout the Ohio Region.

During my fifth year at IBM, to my great surprise, I got an offer from the University of Massachusetts to come there to do my doctorate. I had begun my Masters in English at Indiana State, night classes again. I was under great pressure from my husband to discontinue my studies. When I told him about the U/Mass offer and my intention to do the doctorate, he asked for a divorce. He argued that he had put up with a whole lot in the years I was in school at night and he had the children to care for. Even before I finished my education I was making a whole lot more money than he did and the rift just widened with the first degree. Now, I don't blame him for his reaction. But, I did then.

Q: You were talking about getting your degree.

PERRY: Yes, that was my Bachelors in Political Science. I started my Masters in English as planned, and I didn't expect to begin the doctorate that quickly. A professor I had at Indiana State, Dan Jordan, with whom I had worked in human resources development had later taken a position with the University of Massachusetts. U/Mass had established a new doctoral program, recruiting 32 special doctoral fellows, including several black and other minorities from across the country. Dr. Jordan was asked for one recommendation from Indiana and he named me. So, I resigned my position at IBM and went to Amherst, a move I never regretted.

This special program in Massachusetts was to develop strong educational programs for the Commonwealth. We could try all experimental programs that we wanted to, go for state and federal grants to fund them, which I did successfully. I got quite a bit of federal money for the university that way, and financed my own three-year program.

Q: This was when?

PERRY: This was '68-'69. I finished my doctoral studies and dissertation in 1971, and was granted the degree in 1972.

Q: So this was the height of the civil rights movement?

PERRY: That's right, it was after the burnings had taken place in the late 1960s and there was a grand federal impetuous for bringing minorities in to higher education because there weren't enough blacks at Ph.D level across the nation to develop and manage educational and training programs in the United States. Not all fellows were minorities; at least 50% were whites. The U/Mass program under the leadership of Dean Dwight Allen was a huge success, but not everybody who began the program finished it. Some fellows who were more civil rights activists than scholars, quit along the way, it was quite rigorous. Some seemed to have no higher goal than to voice their dissent or to promote immediate change, and for them long-term study or a doctorate added little to their aspirations. Perhaps, also I thought primarily about earning the "union card" that would launch me into further pursuit of my goal which seemed to be moving closer. But what that doctoral program gave me was freedom to design my own program with courses I wanted to take or needed; the experience of governing my own learning, of making my own choices was mind-blowing. On day one, I told my major professor of my plans to become a U.S. Ambassador to a country in Africa (rather than to just Kenya to broaden my chances) and he laughed because almost everybody in the international education center, came through Peace Corps. The program seemed to be written for them and I was an outsider. The other fellows demanded to know how I intended to do this; how much experience had I had outside the U.S.? When I told them rather haughtily that I had two weeks in Jamaica and that's all I needed to know. They laughed at me, but my advisor didn't. He asked me to tell him more about it and he then became the supporter and the helper I needed to get me through those three years.

Q: His name was?

PERRY: David Schimmel, an attorney turned educator. He had also had been a Peace Corps trainer in the early days in the Virgin Islands, I believe.

Q: All right, you wanted to be an Ambassador, but this was, of course, a time of the Cold War and lots of things were going on. Were you working in an international field, you know keeping up with what the world of diplomacy you know foreign affairs?

PERRY: Yes and no; my specialization area was curriculum development, but in the field of international education, which included diplomacy and foreign affairs. So it was confining for me. But I was exposed in that area by all types of learning and intellectual investigations - especially current affairs, international and domestic, for example, Amherst College just down the street, Hampshire College, Smith College and others, five of them in fact. The President of Amherst at that time, George Plimpton, and his wife were very much involved in all these things. His wife called me to ask if I would go to Nairobi with a group of girls from Colby College, on a secretarial training project sponsored by Operations Crossroad Africa. Would I go? That's where I wanted to be, right? This was 1969, my first trip to Ethiopia and Kenya. What an opportunity which launched my lifelong love affair with Africa. I don't know who recommended me to Mrs. Plimpton .

Q: You were in Kenya from when?

PERRY: Only for the Summer of '69. I went back again in '71, this time recruiting Peace Corp Volunteers nearing the end of their overseas assignments to join a special graduate program I had written at the University in Massachusetts. It had been funded by the Office of Education - a fantastic program teaching and developing African Studies curriculum in the Worcester School District.

Q: Let's talk about - Kenya was your first outside of your two weeks in Jamaica. What was your impression of Kenya in 1969? How did you see it?

PERRY: Well, Kenya first of all did not fit my expectations. It was not like what I had in mind for Nigeria, perhaps, or one of the West African countries. Kenya was very British, you know everything was British. The British had departed but not totally; many of their civil servants remained, and many of the settlers as well. The Kenyans spoke British English. The first thing I was concerned about coming from the background I had was that the Africans were not being given a chance for employment in their own government, under the guise that they were not yet prepared. All positions other than political, including secretarial positions in the various ministries, were held by British citizens. My job there with Colby College was to help begin the training of Kenyan men and women in secretarial skills.

I wrote a proposal, during that period, to the United Nations Economic Commission in Addis, to begin a regional commercial training program to provide a broader based skills development activity. It was well received by decision-makers and a few years later I was recruited by UNECA to return to Addis to design the program. I began to travel back to

Kenya at least once per year for several years, before going there to live for three years with the UNESCO in 1973. I did not experience culture shock in Ethiopia or Kenya; that happened on my first trip to Jamaica.

Q: This was when?

PERRY: That was 1963, when I went for a two-week visit to some Jamaican friends. There, I was faced with under development where I didn't think it should have been. First of all the big shock was the mosquitoes, tiny, black vicious mosquitoes. They weren't like Indiana mosquitoes. The bites itched and left marks and all that. The other was the waste or the dross from the aluminum digs that spread into the beautiful valleys. The narrow roads were incredible. If you wanted to go from one city to the next you had to go round and round the mountain to get there. I said, much to the dismay of my host, "Why don't you people build some bridges. She responded, "Oh, we know about bridges, we don't have the money to do it." True, I was quite ignorant of the cost of development, but surely, I felt, in a country yielding up its riches to America's aluminum industry, decent roads would not have been too much to ask in return. Those things that I saw bothered me, and later when I was in a position to question the antics of American businesses abroad, I did. Of course that situation dramatically changed in the years to come, but those images stayed with me and rudely awakened me to development concerns.. I think that's where I got my shock and not in Kenya.

Q: Your visits back to Kenya in the early '70s, did you see much of a change? Was the education of native Kenyans beginning to permeate the Government?

PERRY: Yes and it happened very quickly in hindsight. I returned in '73 with my new husband, who had taken a position with UNESCO at the University of Nairobi. We were there for three years, and when you live in one country for a spread of time, you began to see things very much differently. A lot of people were being trained not just in Europe but in the United States, some in Indiana, to come back and do specific things. But, the government and economy of Kenya was never totally in the hands of Kenyan people. President Kenyatta was still alive at that time; things began to change when he died, and not for the better. Things really did get bad and we were sort of in the middle of that too when there were a lot of student riots and my husband suffered from tear gas when students were demonstrating on campus. We were always on the side of the Kenyans no matter what did happen. But what happened then was internal fighting as opposed to having a common enemy. I think they stopped seeing the European presence as a common enemy and began to fight among their tribal factions for power.

Q: That is true of most communities and anything else. We are having our problem with the Soviet Union which is going right down the drain. When you went out the initial time in '69 were you looking at the Peace Corps at all? Did you have any feel for what the Peace Corps was doing?

PERRY: Yes, I knew Peace Corps well, since the majority of my doctoral fellows were returned Volunteers. A part of my doctoral program in 1969 was to recruit volunteers in

Africa, for a master's degree program that I had designed at U/Mass. Even prior to that I became involved with the Peace Corps starting in 1963. I always considered it to be a fine introduction for American youth to other worlds, and that they could provide assistance, at low cost, to developing nations in terms of education and health. If I hadn't had small children at the time, I would have volunteered myself for Peace Corps. I liked the work that the Peace Corps was doing and I still do. Later, while my husband was with UNESCO in Kenya, I became a Peace Corps trainer, especially for medical volunteers who would teach in the training hospitals. My job was to give them teaching skills and so I did that for a couple of years. Interestingly, my son in later years also become a Volunteer, in Nepal.

Q: I would have thought that of all the programs the hospital one, the doctors and nurses would be one of the most effective one?

PERRY: Yes, they were truly effective, but most found conditions in the institutions deplorable and the absence of drugs inhibited their work.

Q: I don't have a particular feeling on this one way or the other. One of the great advantages of the Peace Corps is what it does for the people, I mean the Peace Corps Volunteers. Did you feel that the Peace Corps beyond the nurses or doctors who had obviously supplemented the health care, the ones who went out into the bush and the field, do you feel they were making a real contribution to Kenya at the time?

PERRY: Yes, I know they were effective, primarily by example - their willingness to do whatever had to be done to carry out their jobs. They also aided in teaching the English language to children who had no exposure to formal education. I was also working in Ethiopia at the same time. And Ethiopia was the first to impress upon me that the Peace Corps should not work with their young children, because of the transfer of culture. They wanted to preserve their cultural training in the primary schools, for fear that western influence would destroy their heritage. They feared it would deprive Ethiopian teachers of jobs and also of the respect they deserved. That concern was well founded.

Q: I'm told there were battles in villages to get an American teacher?

PERRY: It did happen in the early days of Peace Corps in those countries. The teachers were good and they were enthusiastic, bringing excitement to their classrooms. They had the advantage of knowing what could be, and what could work, how to utilize the environment to teach about things. They really wanted to see the effects of their being there. Some completed their two-year assignments and returned to Kenya and other countries to do something more. For most, the Peace Corps experience influenced in a positive way the rest of their lives. But I found in my research, that Volunteers went out to Africa without any real personal or professional goals. Had they known that they were going to be doing certain things they would have prepared. Secondly, had they known when they were out there what they wanted to do when they came back they would start bringing things back with them. So that's why the two programs I began in the early 1970s were especially effective. I'm still very much for the Peace Corps.

Q: As Foreign Service Officer I was sort of dubious when I first came and then I got in to the Board of Examiners and selecting people and I found the Peace Corps head and shoulders above many of the others. They proved themselves, really more internationally mature, not just tourists, which they might have been otherwise.

PERRY: Some of my teacher trainees who became Peace Corp Volunteers later joined AID and the Foreign Service, and they have done well climbing their respective career ladders. I'm very proud of the contribution Peace Corps has made in all fields. In my experience, they have been most effective change agents around the world, and the experience also made favorable and distinctive changes in them and in the societies to which they returned.

Q: Yes. How did you find in the late '60s early '70s the Government of Kenya as far as the work you were trying to do?

PERRY: I had easy access to the Ministries. The ones that were most important to me were the President, of course and his offices, and the Minister of Education. The Minister of Education was married to an American woman and received his training in the U.S., which gave me easier access to him. There were the undercurrents between the two major tribes, the Kikuyus and the Luos. The Luos were an educated and cultured group of people. The Kikuyus were President Kenyatta's people, leaders of the government, landowners and very powerful. I was there in 1969, when Tom Mboya was assassinated. He was an outstanding, young Luo and potential challenger to Kenyatta. He died just a few yards from where I stood, and that had a profound effect on me.

Q: How did that happen?

PERRY: Well, it was one result of the political rivalry between the Kikuyus and other tribes, over power and control vested in the Office of the Presidency. And any leader espousing opposition to Kenyatta and his clan was surely going to die. So, a truly great man, Mboya, had to die. I was in Kenya that same year when we put our first man on the moon. As I walked down the main street, I saw people gathered around a store window that had a television set. I expressed aloud how wonderful it was that we put a man on the moon and due to modern technology, people in Africa could witness this event. But, one fellow turned to me and said, "Oh, it isn't true. It's Hollywood. In America, you can do anything you want and make us believe it."

Q: I'm told this is one of the things felt everywhere; people think they are all myths, it never happened.

PERRY: Yes, I found that a curious observation, and perhaps my introduction to a certain level of mistrust of Americans. I thought, unlike other countries, America would never say we did something we didn't do! But, I concentrated on my plans to become American Ambassador to Kenya, and the basis of this mistrust was something I needed to research along with other information I might find, tribal conflicts. Every little thing was important and exciting to me.

Q: Were you getting to know the people? Do you remember the name of the Ambassador?

PERRY: Yes, McIlvaine, I believe. He wrote a book on the conflict called “The Reds and the Blacks,” which made him quite unpopular with the Kenyan government.

Q: Were you sort of casing the joint seeing what they were up to and all that?

PERRY: It's interesting that I didn't care so much for the Ambassador's role, which I saw primarily as pomp and circumstance - at that time. It seemed to be very political, and unrelated to the real problems facing the Kenyan people. I was more into development and development issues. I worked with USIS. They sent me out on educational project design in Kenya, Nigeria and Zambia while my husband was working with UNESCO. I guess I've done a million things at one time. But I had a good chance to contrast what was going on in Zambia in particular and Nigeria, a country I thought was vibrant and exciting. I also returned there many times in subsequent years, but I didn't want to live there. Kenya was sort of a peaceful oasis between every other country at that time.

Q: It was also a place where an awful lot of international agencies settled giving it sort of an international flavor.

PERRY: Yes, UNEP (United Nations Environmental Protection Agency) was built there at that time whereas others had national and regional agencies or offices. UNEP brought in a whole lot of different nationalities and enrollment of their children helped to develop better schools. My three children attended the American International School in Nairobi, run by U.S. University out of California.

In 1968 when I decided that I would go do the doctorate, my husband said he didn't want to be married to me anymore. I was going to be gone for at least two years and he felt that that was too much of a strain on everything and he wanted a divorce. He said later he didn't mean that at all. He just wanted me to stay home. But, I filed for divorce and left for Amherst. I had set this goal for myself and I had to go. But, I didn't complete the divorce until two years later.

When I was in my final year at the University of Massachusetts, I ran into this husband - by accident or divine plan - my first serious boyfriend back in Indiana whom I hadn't seen in 24 years.

Q: This is James Perry?

PERRY: Correct. There's more to this story, too, which I will leave for my book. But the short of it, is that we did marry in '71. By that time I was well into my career development and the UN contacted me shortly after I married him saying, they wished to hire me to go out to Ethiopia to do some work on a long-term contract. When I presented this proposition to my new husband, he said, "I'm not going with you. I'm not going to

follow a woman around Africa. I've got my own career here." I thought, "Am I going to lose another husband and family over this career that I'm after?"

So I thought and I prayed about how to manage what I must do. Finally, I put his credentials together (he has a Ph.D. in science education and curriculum development and minor travel experience, and sent them to the UN. I explained the situation, stating I would accompany him if he were selected. Thus, they would get two for one.

They replied almost immediately with orders to go to a UNESCO project at the University of Nairobi. He was delighted - marvelous what ego can accomplish. It didn't matter to me which of us had the assignment. My plan was to go and live in Kenya. So we packed up the children and went to Kenya for those three years. During that time, I did consultations with USIS and Peace Corps, projects that paid well for the things that I did. They kept my nose to the grindstone, but gave me opportunities to meet the people on a social basis. I joined a lot of civic organizations and worked unofficially with NGOs, some of them were also foreign groups. I learned a lot about women's issues in Kenya by affiliating with the local and international groups and accepting speaking engagements throughout the country. I was able to help them move up the ladder to move into UN employment; some I helped to come to the States to be educated. I have run into many of them on my return visits to Kenya and other countries in the world.

Q: Were women in Kenya being able to begin to have opportunities or was it still pretty circumspect?

PERRY: In my earlier years in Kenya, women had a very hard time. The man took his cues from the male lion, it seemed, and in many ways women suffered not so differently the things American women endured at that time. A woman's purpose for being was to serve the man. He did whatever he wanted, and the woman did whatever he wanted. There were few options. I wrote an unpublished novel, one I vowed to finish, which dealt with this problem in a dramatic way. I couldn't have published it at the time - a story of trust and betrayal between a man and his wife, both professionals and American educated. Since I plan to publish it, I choose not to reveal the plot here, but it deals with the inevitable conflicts between tribal traditions and western values in a modern society where one would think it should not happen. How does one live in between these two?

Q: What about Ethiopia? You were working there at a time when Haile Selassie was emperor, or at least towards of the end of his time? He had been there since 1913. What was your impression of Ethiopia at the time, particularly in contrast to Kenya.

PERRY: Ethiopia was beautiful, is still beautiful. During those days, it was peaceful and tranquil and I had little inkling of the undercurrents which later surfaced in the most devastating way. The city of Addis Ababa was well laid out; there was a lot of poverty, lots of beggars, in the midst of great privilege enjoyed by a few. I knew there was dissent, but it didn't show. It was a society full of tradition, history, pride and respect. When the Emperor would ride down the streets in his chariot drawn by his beautiful white horses, it was amazing-- the people would fall on their faces as he passed, even those who were

well educated. They had such respect and fear of the Emperor. He was gone when I went back to work there from 1976-78 at the Economic Commission for Africa and things were vastly different, with deadly changes rapidly occurring under the Dergue - many being killed on the streets. But, again I had the opportunity to know the Ethiopian people and I developed a sense of family and kinship with them. In later years, when my son Mark grew to be a man, he married an Ethiopian girl, whom we dearly love.

As you can see, most of the carpets and artifacts I have in this house are from Ethiopia, and I have gathered them over many years of travel to Ethiopia. I was there when the Russians and Cubans came. I remember so clearly going into the grocery store where I had always traded and the owner, I think he was Greek, said, "You know the difference between the Americans and the Russians? Five Russians will come in to shop and leave with one bag of groceries; one American will come in and buy five bags." The Americans wherever they had gone in the world, have left a lot, have supported the families of their domestic staffs with food and schooling, and had also helped them to leave the country when things got bad. Regardless which country I have been in, it has been true. The French don't actually leave; they will stay there. The English take everything with them when they go, leaving nothing.

Q: The Russians, too?

PERRY: Development was not a part of their presence or foreign assistance. They brought nothing in, so it wasn't necessary to take it out.

Q: How did you find working in Ethiopia with the Mengistu regime which was about as bad as they come? Were you able to do much?

PERRY: I didn't have to because I was with the UN. I worked within the UN system, and the system negotiated with the Mengistu Government. I did very little with government officials and it was seldom necessary to visit government offices. Everything was very restrained and there was an element of fear because you didn't know what might happen. We were warned not to travel around at night, and certainly not to be out after curfew. A U.N. colleague from Benin, a young man very involved in courting the beautiful Ethiopian women, ignored the warning. Trying to beat the curfew, he turned on the wrong street. The soldiers shot through the roof of the car, severely injuring him for life. Even with U.N. plates on your car, you could not be safe. They used to stop me in my car even though I had UN plates on it, and even though I spoke some Amharic, I pretended not to understand them. I'd try to be as American as I could possibly be to get away from them. Of all the countries that I worked in I still think Ethiopia is by far the one that I respect the most.

Q: Were you keeping your political credentials up?

PERRY: Yes it was in my mind at all times. This is what I need to know. I need to know the African languages, I need to know how these governments work. I need to know how to be sensitive to what they are saying and to analyze their meanings. All of these things I was thinking about not as a job, but as ways to get to know the people and the

government, and from my part, to establish trust, how to know their problems, how best to know their needs. In mixing with American officials in these countries, I learned about American foreign policy and America's goals for that country. My thinking included questions on my country's interests and programs and how I could best serve my government while keeping the needs of the people in mind. These thoughts were always foremost in my mind.

Q: At one point you ended up working with the Peace Corps volunteer '71-'73 in Sierra Leone.

PERRY: Yes, after finishing my program at the University of Massachusetts, I married and went to live in Houston, teaching at Texas Southern University. There, I designed a reverse Teacher Corp/Peace Corp program which prepared teachers first to teach in Houston's inner city schools for one year, then sent them to Sierra Leone and other countries for two to three years with Peace Corps. My husband and I were responsible for overseeing their graduate studies while in the country, so we traveled from time to time to provide instruction and guidance toward their academic degrees. That program is finished now but we trained over 200 teachers, about 100 who because Peace Corps volunteers, well trained and already knew the language when they got to Sierra Leone.

Q: What is the language in Sierra Leone?

PERRY: English is the commercial language, which is taught after early grammar school. Krio is a broken English patois, but has a formal, written language, which has become the official language. There are also several tribal languages, including Swahili.

Q: I would like to concentrate on the time you were an Ambassador. The Carter Administration came in '77. Did that leave you any opportunity or did you have to play the Republican card?

PERRY: I always played the Republican card. I knew I wasn't going anywhere with Carter and the Democrat administration. I returned to Houston from Ethiopia and Kenya in early 1978 and remained here until 1982. When I came back to Texas Southern, President Carter was in, and George Bush was running for President. I had worked with his campaign as a volunteer. When he became Vice President under Mr. Reagan, I went to one of his supporters and said, "Look, I want to be Ambassador. This is what I've done, here is my resume." He said, "Why don't you write George and tell him what you want." So I did. I wrote him and was amazed that no matter how busy this man was, he answered my letter. It bore his signature; he responded that only the President could name Ambassadors, but that he was very pleased with my credentials and would forward my name to Loret Ruppe, Director of Peace Corps, to see what might be available. I did not accept the country directorship offered me by Loret, because I needed to remain in the U.S. until my younger son graduated from high school. Later, I was offered a position with A.I.D., Africa Bureau, under the direction of Frank Ruddy, who later also became ambassador. I came to Washington in 1982. That's when my diplomatic journey began.

Q: You were basically in Washington from '82 to '86?

PERRY: Yes.

Q: What were you doing with AID?

PERRY: I was the Chief of Education and Human Resources Development for AID Africa, establishing policies and educational programs for the 43 Sub-Saharan nations receiving our assistance at that time. The policies dealt with delivering to the countries and regions the kind of assistance provided by our Congress. There were several foreign service officers serving in the field who kept me advised on what was needed to make the programs most effective. I had opportunities to travel to many of these countries to do regional conferences and workshops on educational issues, which involved local educators and decision-makers. Through this process, over the four-year period, I got to know those countries very well. That's another reason why I feel so comfortable in Africa.

Q: This was during the first Reagan Administration. What was your impression of the interest of Department of State, the White House in Africa at that particular time?

PERRY: The interest was basically humanitarian, relatively little of the policy centered around strategic interests. I worked with A.I.D., not the State Department, and their programs contained some good, basic development activities in health and education and a limited amount of infrastructure development. Whatever assistance given was from that humanitarian perspective; it encouraged involvement of American universities and small businesses in carrying out or implementing these projects. As you know, at that time, the U.S. was quite concerned with potential Russian interference in those countries, and sometimes our policies reflected that concern.

Q: Keeping it in the early part of the Reagan Administration, you might say the hard line right was calling the shots much more than they did later on, particularly in South Africa. It took a while to put something together there. You haven't mentioned South Africa. Were you involved in any way with that country?

PERRY: Yes, we had projects in South Africa, with an understanding but no official agreement with the Apartheid government to conduct them. You might recall Chet Crocker's policy of Constructive Engagement, where with no official agreement with the government - as we had with other nations - our assistance was funneled through NGOs and regional organizations to assist the education and training of black people disadvantaged by apartheid policies and practices. A part of my job was to go into South Africa to develop such projects, not alone but as a member of professional teams. One organization we worked with was the Bar Association, at that time being established to train and organize attorneys for the job they would be called upon to do with the abolition of apartheid.

Q: You are talking about in the Black community?

PERRY: Yes, in the Black community, especially in Johannesburg and Cape Town. My last trip there was significant to me. I went down there with the Black Education Association, although there were many whites in this organization. It was considered a Black organization for the training of teachers. AID sent a number of people to work in teacher training; many South African teachers and students were being recruited for long-term and short-term programs in American universities, managed by IIE and other international organizations. My job was to figure out what kinds of projects the U.S. Government should support, to whom the money should go and to do what. It was while I was down there in 1986 that I received "the" call from President Reagan asking if I would be his Ambassador to Sierra Leone. I danced and danced, in my book you will have to read it, *All Things Being Equal*, which gives greater detail.

Q: Let's talk about this. Had you done any preliminary work you know sort nudging people over at the White House saying I'd like Sierra Leone? You'd been there before.

PERRY: Yes, I was in contact with the White House. They knew about my interest from my original letter prior to my appointment to A.I.D., during Mr. Reagan's first administration. I had met from time to time with people in the White House, not necessarily those who made the decision. The first year of Mr. Reagan's second administration, friends of mine in the White House were urging me to inform the White House appointment office what I wanted to do. I did get an appointment with the Appointments Office and I told people there about how I worked all these years to become Ambassador and I was interested in going to Africa. I doubt that many people were expressing such strong interest in becoming an ambassador to African countries.

Q: Political appointees very seldom went to Africa:

PERRY: Many, as you know, preferred European assignments. But, a good many accepted appointments in Africa. The White House examined my credentials including the letter from George Bush. They called me shortly after that, informing me that I was being considered. They gave me a short list of about five countries and I think I stopped at Sierra Leone and said, "This is where I would like to go." The original contact had already been made, but no commitment until President Reagan telephoned me.

Q: Did you get any training before you went out to Sierra Leone?

PERRY: Yes. Of course, I was already in the Government and my knowledge of the bureaucracy was of great benefit. A two week seminar was conducted for new ambassadors, organized and conducted by retired and inservice ambassadors. Some of the appointees had never lived in Washington before; some said they had never been there before. I knew the jargon. I knew the locations of places and had worked with a number of organizations. Our training included meeting with various governmental agencies for briefings on their policies toward Africa and their separate programs and activities. The new ambassadors were being sent to countries in Africa but to other countries as well. We had our separate meetings on policies, depending on countries and regions. We also

were briefed on embassy management procedures, diplomatic behavior, staffing, government properties and their management.

I think it would have been very hard for me had I not already been in Africa. I knew the constraints and limitations. I truly did not know the full power of the Ambassador. I soon learned. They told us, "This is heady. This is not like anything you have ever done before. You are the President of the United States in that country where you are going to be. You are speaking with the voice of not only the President but the Congress and the people of the United States, and you have to be sensitive to all that." The best trainer we had was Shirley Temple Black. She had served as Ambassador to Ghana on her first tour.

Q: She founded the program.

PERRY: She was very good at it. She gave us the benefit of her experiences but she also had senior Ambassadors who would come in and talk to us from time to time. It was good training. Most of us felt we could have taken more, there was so much to learn. The problem here is that I was a woman in a male role you might say. My husband received training normally given to the spouse, the woman, that is. It was like these are the records you are going to have to keep and you have to count this and you have so much money budgeted to do this. There were two other men in the program with him and they just quit and said, "We'll go down and visit our wives from time to time. We are not going to run their household." J.O. had recently retired from Texas Southern University to go with me, and the spousal role was one he never accepted.

Q: You were in Sierra Leone from '86 to '89?

PERRY: Yes

Q: What was Sierra Leone like? Could you talk about the economy and the government and American interest in Sierra Leone at this time?

PERRY: Looking back when we were training Peace Corps volunteers, President Siaka Stevens was in control as he had been for years and years; the economy was high, the people had very little but were not suffering; the diamonds were the chief export and rice became the second. Everything was up; you could feel the excitement, the energy, in the streets. There weren't a whole lot of foreigners there at that time. Peace Corps was very larger with many volunteers stationed about the country. People loved them.

When I returned as Ambassador, the degradation was heart-breaking. The buildings were falling apart, unpainted. There was this lethargy that you sensed among people on the streets, the kiosks were not swarming with people buying stuff. There were deep underlying problems as the administration changed. A new President had just been appointed the year before my arrival.

Q: They are not elected?

PERRY: Well, supposedly. This was a most unusual situation. The former president, Siaka Stevens, had run the country into bankruptcy due to his excesses and had been forced by his parliament to step down. There was nothing left when he agreed to remove himself if his replacement (the only candidate) were elected to the office. Although technically, President Momoh was popularly elected, it was clear that Siaka Stevens had put him into office. Momoh was his top General and a respected man, but the manner of his “election” was deeply resented by the people. He also seemed not have the fire, the passion for the position, I guess you could say, that Siaka Stevens exhibited. He was a military man and not prepared to run the Government. He had to rely upon people who were generally Stevens' people, whose mandate was to maintain the status quo. Stevens built, at government expense, a mansion on top of the mountain where he could see everything. He was still in control, and controlling all things through Momoh or outside Momoh's knowledge or consent. I made this joke that I wanted to be Ambassador to the Mau Maus, right? Instead I got a Momoh.

He and I bonded immediately, perhaps because I was coming in new as Ambassador and he was coming in new as President. I recommended many actions to him that, that surely today with my current knowledge, I would have a hard time suggesting. He acted on them, which angered some of his cabinet members, many who felt he did it because I was a woman. Certainly, the pressure from me, if any at all, was softer than that expended by my diplomatic colleagues. My advice was related to how to approach my government to achieve the desired results. As time went by, the unrest between the major tribes increased dramatically. In many ways, it helped that he was not from a major tribe.

Q: What was the tribal characteristic? I read something about the slave trade. The British took slaves, they captured slave ships and they took them to Freetown. That's where it got its name, I guess. Then they turned them loose but they came from a whole variety?

PERRY: These repatriated slaves came from Europe, primarily from England; but they also came from Nova Scotia, from Jamaica, from places in the British Empire that were prohibited by law to continue their traffic in slavery. This group eventually established Freetown as a dropping off destination, although they may have originated from other countries. They called themselves Krios, and spoke a patois. This new colony met with great opposition from the tribal groups already occupying this territory and without support received from the British Navy, Freetown would have been wiped out by sheer numbers of the tribal forces. Some of the Krios were racially mixed and were considered misfits, foreigners who didn't really belong to that country. But, the Krios were powerful and soon became the managers of the British Colony and civil servants for England.

Tribal resistance came from a great many tribal groups; but the major tribes were the Mendes and Temne who had historically battled over territory. Most had populated the uplands, avoiding the coast which was swampy and full of malaria. Once established on the Atlantic coast, Freetown began to flourish and established a great economy that generated wealth throughout the country. But the wealth and the diamonds and so forth were in the hands of those two tribes. Over the centuries, the Krios succeeded in

assimilating tribal youth by bringing them to Freetown for their education. Most of the leaders from these two tribes were graduates of the British type schools in Freetown. They went off to England to pursue their higher education and were able to prosper in the Krio society upon their return. However, the friction grew between the Krios and a growing mass of educated people in those tribes who thought, as a majority, they could run the government better. President Momoh was eventually overthrown by the combined effort of these groups. He was still in office when I left in 1989, but it has since fallen into chaos and anarchy.

Q: We're talking today of a horrible situation in Sierra Leone and there's really no rule at all you just have some warring warlords doing terrible things to the population. It's not even a country really anymore.

PERRY: You know it goes back to their history and the perception of the majority of the people that they were still under colonial rule; that is, by the Krios - not considered a native group. The controlling power of the Krios was diminished following the demise and death of Siaka Stevens, himself a powerful Krio. But, the two major tribes - supported by a number of powerful but smaller groups, seemed unable to establish a coalition government by which to govern the country. The major concern was to establish control over the country's wealth and its government, not a shared control. In this case, when a rebel group led by Sankoh took control, everyone suffered - all the people suffered greatly.

Q: The same thing is happening in Liberia.

PERRY: In Bosnia and almost every place else. The world is struggling with the concept of ethnicity; who should be in control. Look at Rwanda and Burundi.

Q: Did we have any particular policy? This is the last part of the Reagan Administration. Did you see any effort made by the State Department to stop the carnage in Sierra Leone, or were our efforts limited to reporting?

PERRY: The carnage began a few years after my departure, when the Embassy was closed and all personnel evacuated to safer areas. While I was there, American interests were narrow at best. One great concern was the mischief that could erupt from the manipulative power of the merchant Lebanese and Afro-Lebanese who gained economic control. There was also the reported interest of the Russians and the Libyans in the country, how that might affect American business and presence in the country.

Q: Who was your deputy?

PERRY: Greg Talcott, my first deputy, was a career Foreign Service officer with considerable experience. He left after the second year and his experience, but his knowledge helped get us through some tough spots. Gary Maybarduk succeeded him for my final year. I knew the personality of the country and people far better than either of them, due to prior experience. We did not always agree on the analysis and reporting

regarding the situation in the country. Sierra Leone was a big market for PL-480 rice and wheat, which kept certain American congressmen and farmers happy. I quarreled, however, with bringing “free” rice into a rice producing economy. They could no longer grow the local rice and sell it at a price that was competitive with ours. They in fact did not like our long grain rice. They would accept the low cost bags of American rice and trade them for one bag of theirs because their rice tasted better. We could have done more in that country to help them to grow their own rice. What we did was spur the illegal international rice trade over the borders of Liberia and Guinea, both local rice and PL-480, which brought foreign currency into the hands of merchants - defeating government controls.

Q: We had a big rice lobby in the U.S., one of the most powerful ones in Louisiana.

PERRY: Here in Texas too. There was nothing wrong with the rice; it just didn't cook up or taste like their rice. Certainly other rice-producing countries were competing for the market; e.g., China, and Malaysia, who could bring it in at a lower price than ours. Their shipments would often sour, especially the wheat, and the quality wasn't as reliable as ours. PL-480 became a big business for rice distributors in the country.

Q: While you were there for example, the diamond trade, did you find pressure? I understand Mr. Tempelsman or something was a major figure, an American, very much involved in New York with Jackie Kennedy. Did you find the diamond policy intruded in your work?

PERRY: It did and intruded greatly with government. Everybody was involved in mining and selling diamonds out of the country, illegally, including government officials. These are alluvial diamonds, gemstones, highly prized in the European markets. They were easily accessible until later years, and there were lots of them. The government tried valiantly to gain control, but smuggling was rampant and it was seemingly impossible. Eventually, the government claimed all diamond lands and cordoned them off with military watch to prevent the rampant theft. It was a deadly business leading to lots of government fraud and corruption.

President Momoh said to me quite early in our relationship something very poignant that stuck in my memory: “No matter the safeguards and policies put forward regarding the diamonds, nothing will work in Sierra Leone - nothing will get better until the diamonds are all gone, absolutely gone.” Since there are still deep shaft diamonds not yet exploited, it will be years and years before the country is at peace. Today's events, with the murdering and maiming of innocent children, show to what extent this is true.

Q: It is highly easy portable wealth. Were you doing anything to provoke commerce or was this just a government that needed support rather than try to develop trade?

PERRY: I was trying to bring more American entrepreneurship I should say. This is not a country that can support big industry. There was, however, one huge American venture in the mining of rutile, which was a multi-million dollar operation Do you know about rutile

Q: No, I don't. What is it?

PERRY: Rutile is a mineral, a pigment that is used in paints and it is also an element used for manufacturing struts for jet engines. It is also called titanium. It is quite rare ore and large deposits are found only found in two or three places in the world; e.g., Sierra Leone and Australia. This was a high tech, high cost but lucrative venture deep in the country. Outside of some small ventures, like a flour mill, for example, Sierra Rutile was the only substantial American investment in the country. Trying to increase American business was a large part of my mission there. Most companies who investigated the possibility felt the infrastructure was not strong enough to support any kind of industry.

Q: How about the British? Did you find yourself in competition with the British or working together, how did that work?

PERRY: We worked together I think more than competing with each other, as in some other countries like Kenya. This was a former British colony; we were newcomers. Living in Sierra Leone provided a rather leisurely lifestyle for the different expatriates and business people who lived there. The tensions were greater between the Sierra Leoneans and the Lebanese, for example, who had been there for more than fifty years. They effectively controlled vast pieces of the economy and dominated almost every industry that was. So, there was bitterness among the Sierra Leoneans who felt money was being siphoned from their economy to support the war effort in Lebanon.

Q: I would have thought, looking at the East Indian situation in Uganda, at some point the Lebanese must be thinking sometime we are all going to get kicked out of here? Was that something they were concerned about?

PERRY: I'm sure that it was behind everything that they were thinking, but I don't think it was a great inhibitor for their continuing behavior. The Lebanese moved quite freely to and fro without harassment from the government until it appeared other nationalities were using them as a convenient cover; e.g., the Iranians, Libyans, etc. At that time, the U.S. was having serious problems with Iran. There was considerable tension between the Islamic sects and competition for members and influence. The Iranians and Libyans opened embassies in Sierra Leone eventually, and established Islamic schools throughout the country, gaining favor with the rural and uneducated population.

Q: There were Sierra Leoneans who were Muslims?

PERRY: Yes, ethnic groups throughout the country were about evenly split between Christian and Muslim; perhaps there were greater numbers of Muslims in the rural areas.

Q: This was a time of continuous terrorism, were you under any threats at all?

PERRY: No, we tend to measure levels of threat on the basis of whether it came from an internal or external source. The internal, which seemed the greatest potential threat, came from the increasing tensions between tribal groups and the government. Also, the large

Islamic population in that country included those with whom we were having serious political disputes; e.g., the Iranians and Libyans. Although it was necessary to maintain caution, it made little sense that these groups would make trouble in a country granting them refuge. Nonetheless, it posed a frightening internal threat. Eventually, the external threat came from rebel forces in Liberia who eventually overtook the cities and regions of Sierra Leone, eventually taking the capital. In reaction to this threat, together with the internal threat, forced the U.S. Embassy to close its doors.

Q: Were the Libyans messing around there, too?

PERRY: Yes, heavily involved with their “green book” operation, until many were expelled for interfering with the government. They closed their embassy, but left their relations intact so they could return if things changed.

Q: Did you have a CIA station there at all?

PERRY: We did not have a declared station.

Q: How was life as an Ambassador?

PERRY: Great, fantastic, demanding, exciting, exhausting. And I think in many ways it was different for a woman Ambassador. My relationship with government officials was overall positive. I was not the first female American Ambassador, nor the first Black American Ambassador - I was the first who was both black and woman. Although the women embraced my strength and felt empowered by my presence, the men in government were somewhat threatened. Traditionally the Ambassador had been a male - all of my colleagues heading the fifteen or so embassies were male. Some men (and especially the military) made a point to salute my husband when he accompanied me.

I know I brought a certain softness to strained situations that allowed me to get information as well as to influence decisions. On the other hand, I did not have a good relationship with the Foreign Minister. He was supposed to be my first contact in the government, but I had a direct line and open door to the President, which the Minister resented. He was Muslim and on his first visit to the State Department (which I had arranged) he tried to have me recalled. He didn't know I was going to be in the meeting. His face fell when he saw me, but he said simply there was a problem between us that he did not think could be resolved. Surprised, I asked him, "What do you think the problem could be? What is it?" He said, "You do not like my religion." It was ridiculous! I had never done anything to offend Islam, other than just being a woman - in leadership. It was fixed clearly in his mind that as a woman, I could not be Ambassador. That was the biggest thing.

This inexcusable and unprovoked action taken by the Foreign Minister against me became a sore point between the two. The President first apologized to me, and then began the necessary political actions to remove him from his Cabinet. He succeeded, but not before I left the country.

Q: Did you find President Momoh and his role not very popular? Was he still sort of subordinate to the former President?

PERRY: Definitely for the first two years at least. Siaka Stevens continued to run the country, as head of the ruling party. President Momoh eventually managed to get that leadership away from him and he was named the leader of the party. In my final year in Sierra Leone, Papa Siaka died and President Momoh became leader of the Party. His two vice presidents representing the two major tribes were also maneuvering for leadership. His first vice president, a brilliant attorney and parliamentarian, who came from a Mende stronghold called Pujehun, was charged with treason during my final year, and was actually hanged to death after I left. But again I think he was not the one they were really after. It was an attempt to scare off other forces who eventually took over anyway.

Q: Did Momoh come to you and sort of talk about his problems with the former President and all that?

PERRY: Yes, in answer to my direct questions about the perception that the country was being ruled from the top of the mountain. There was little guile in this man. He would confess, "Well you know he is a very powerful force and I do go up and talk to him and he gives me advice like he gives everybody else and I take what I think will work and otherwise I don't." He didn't say that there were great pressures put upon him but we knew that there were. In order to try to maintain this balance, not being a member of a major tribe, he had two Vice Presidents, one was a Mende (who I explained was later hanged for treason) and the other was a Temne. The way he kept the peace, Momoh said, was to keep them at each other's throats so he could appear to be very kind and generous and an unbiased mediator. He considered them as vicious persons. I also tended to trust one more than the other but then I realized I also had to maintain a balance. Momoh was not in a good position and he said many times, "I wish I had not accepted the Presidency. I always wanted to be a preacher. That's all I ever wanted, just to be a preacher and to help people." I said, "Well, maybe you can do that after you give up the Presidency." He said, "Don't you know there is no giving up the Presidency? You are relieved one way or another." His life was threatened when the government was overtaken by a rebel force, but he escaped to neighboring Guinea where he was given refuge. So far as I know, he remains there today.

Q: At the end of the Reagan Administration, you went to Burundi in 1990. How did that come about?

PERRY: When Mr. Bush became President, I knew I had only a few months to remain in Sierra Leone as Ambassador. Most political ambassadors would be recalled, as in any change of administration. So, I returned on short leave to talk to the new White House transition team, to make known my interests in serving Mr. Bush as ambassador. I informed the person interviewing me that I was the only black woman, political ambassador, serving abroad in the Reagan Administration. I felt I had done a good job in a hardship post in Africa; I was always a Bush supporter, and I wanted to go out again to

serve Mr. Bush's administration. Then I returned to Sierra Leone to complete my mission. The upshot was, within a few weeks, I received "the" call from President Bush asking if I would go to Burundi.

Burundi is French-speaking, a former Belgian colony. My French was minimal and I knew I was going to really have to get to work on it but it would be a good opportunity to learn French so I said, "Yes."

Q: So you served there from 1989-1993, the whole Bush Administration?

PERRY: Yes.

Q: When you got out there in '89 what was the situation in Burundi? Can you describe Burundi at that time?

PERRY: I left Sierra Leone in August, 1989, but due to language training and required surgery, did not reach Burundi until February, 1990. I found the country much like Ethiopia, people look like Ethiopians, especially the Tutsi people. And, historically they stem from that direction. They were difficult to fathom. As an outsider, you had to be liked very much before they would open up and share anything. That was the first opinion I had. I had to submerge memories of Burundi in the past months in order to focus on Sierra Leone for *All Things Being Equal*. Now, I am sharply focused on Burundi for the next book, *O Burundi, Thou Bleeding Piece of Earth*, in order not to confuse events which took place in one place and not the other.

Bujumbura, with one main street, reminded me so much of Texas, the early Texas towns. The city and countryside were absolutely gorgeous, with the backdrop of Lake Tanganyika and the glorious clouds that formed above and below the blue mountains of Zaire - 25 miles across the lake. Lake Tanganyika is the longest lake in the world, and the second deepest. I had a breathtaking view of all this from my front verandah and I painted it, that painting above the fireplace in my living room.

I found all the people to be very gentle, kind, and respectful - but inscrutable. It was impossible to read their thoughts. They would say that Burundi is one country, with one people, with one language, but you had the sense it wasn't a nation of peace or one without division. For all my time in the country, I did not always know which were Hutu and which were Tutsi by their features or their speech patterns. But, I learned to recognize differences, although they were not consistently identifiable due to the pattern of intermarriages between the two. They were all handsome and intelligent people.

I guess my first real memory of coming face to face with the underlying friction was my first attendance at Armed Forces Day. All Ambassadors were invited to come out and sit in covered stands to watch the parade of French-made tanks and mounted guns. They were polished, shining in the bright sunlight like new money, ready for combat; the troops all stood tall, disciplined; the drums were fearsome, their deep and strong sounds reverberating through one's chest, stomach, head. The army in its state of readiness was

indeed impressive. I turned to one of the Burundian authorities and said, "Who's the enemy?" He looked at me like "Stupid." I continued to ask that question. If there is no threat from the outside, why such a war effort? Rwanda has no interest in Burundi; Zaire doesn't want any part of it; Tanzania shows no interest. Who is the enemy? When I finally asked the right person, he informed me that it's the Hutus - they are the enemy, the internal threat. So that well-oiled military machine I was looking at was all Tutsi; no Hutu could serve in the fighting military. Of course, I had been briefed about this, but it was nearly overwhelming to observe the hundreds of these men, six-feet and over, pass before you. When you hear at the same time the amazing drummers of Burundi, definitely a part of the war machinery, not just drummers, you saw them as a part of this ferocious military. The ceremonial drums built fear in the hearts of the Hutus. That's the impression I had of the country on my arrival. But when I met the President, I felt only respect and warmth for him.

Q: Who was the President?

PERRY: He was Pierre Buyoya, a military man, who is also, by the way, the current President of Burundi. His public speeches always centered on the need for unity and peace. Although he also was Tutsi, he recognized that they were a small albeit powerful minority, surrounded by 80% Hutu majority. He knew at some point it would come to a head. The Belgians, he said, had been very cruel as colonizers - more cruel in the manner they left the country. It was simpler to place the blame on the Belgians for the inability of the Burundians to live peacefully as one people.

Q: Their rule in the Congo is renowned for its viciousness.

PERRY: Same thing. According to historians, the Belgians killed off people, hacked up people, committed all types of atrocities to place fear in the minds of the people. Then, they chose an intelligent warrior group, a small minority--the Tutsis, to rule the country upon their departure. President Buyoya, picked by the Tutsis to lead, I sincerely believed, wanted to bring peace to the country. He followed much of our advice on establishing a democracy, agreed to the formation of multi parties and a democratic election--he was really with us the whole way. He believed he could win the election; he was beloved by most of the people for his efforts to bring peace and equity. But sheer numbers were against him and he lost. I wasn't there at the end because I was recalled by the Clinton administration six months before the whole thing collapsed. President Buyoya made an appeal to the State Department to keep me there six months longer through the election, noting the hard work I had done in the previous years to bring together all the factions. I had indeed worked very hard to get this democratic election and I spent my final year meeting with these various groups, the ethnic groups and their branches, the inter-tribal and intra-tribal concerns. I would get them together to eat at my house, with an excellent French translator there who could get all the nuances that I might miss from my understanding of French. I was never told what decisions had been made, but they would go off and try to work it out. When they reached an impasse, we would set up another dinner and work it through. So we saved the democratic election when it was doomed to failure. And, then I was recalled. President Clinton did not immediately appoint another

Ambassador. So within six months following the apparently peaceful elections and the formation of a new Hutu government, it all collapsed with the assassinations of the President and five of his Ministers. The war was on.

Q: Our interests in the place are really to make sure they didn't kill each other. Do we have other interests?

PERRY: We had a truly great interest in preserving the peace in the Central Africa Region which was critical to our national interests. Burundi had been a stable key to that peace. Zaire was entering an unstable and troublesome period and the U.S. Government was rapidly losing favor and influence over the affairs of this vast nation. Mobutu thought he had served the U.S. well when they needed him and now they wanted him to bow out, and to allow democracy to take root. He strongly refused and the country became chaotic. Rwanda 's situation become more volatile with the hour. It was quite evident that unless the U.S. intervened to stabilize Rwanda and Burundi, the region was going to collapse. We did not, and, it did.

Q: Did that same ethnic diversity - i.e., the Hutu and/Tutsi - exist in Rwanda as well?

PERRY: Differently, but yes.

Q: How was it different?

PERRY: The Hutus were in power in Rwanda. As opposed to Burundi, the Belgians left Rwanda in the hands of the Hutus, the majority ethnic group. The Hutu majority became the power brokers, but they did not wisely use the Tutsi, who were the educated, moneyed and powerful people. In a particularly bloody uprising about 40 years earlier, Tutsi families were massacred by the Hutus; those remaining were forced to flee Rwanda and were given exile in Uganda. Years later, Museveni built a strong military comprised of many fearless Tutsi warriors, with whose help he ousted the hated Idi Amin, When he became president of Uganda, he vowed to support the Tutsi return to Rwanda, even by force, when the time came. It was rumored that he himself was half-Tutsi.

Q: Was there any connection between the Hutus in Rwanda and Burundi and the Tutsis in Rwanda and Burundi?

PERRY: Of course. They are the same ethnic groupings. Their languages are slightly different, but very much the same, and they also understand each other. They worked together from time to time. The relations between the two countries were cordial and relationships between the individual ethnic groups were also strong: Hutu to Hutu; Tutsi to Tutsi. The ethnic war began first in Rwanda with insurgencies from Uganda by the exiled Tutsis. In retaliation, Hutus began to massacre the Tutsis in the interior of Rwanda, who then began to flee into Burundi. They settled into refugee camps in the northern part of Burundi which was closer to Rwanda.

It is a long and difficult problem. It is not possible for me to give you in an interview

more than a quite simplistic view of a hideously complicated war. I urge you to read my book, *Thou Bleeding Piece of Earth*, which gives a more in-depth version of the situation as well as a critique of the response or non-response of the American government to the bloodbath, the killing fields of Rwanda and Burundi - a genocide that many of us feel could have been avoided.

Q: Was there an effort made to go out and check on how things were going along the border lines and all that?

PERRY: Yes, my security officers as well as regional security people kept close watch on incidents along the borders and traditional trouble spots in the country. I myself went often just to observe and to be observed. We checked out all rumors of genocidal killings which, in spite of loud denials from the government and rebel groups, were often found to be true. Burundi had become a haven for refugees from Rwanda, from Zaire, from Tanzania, both Hutu and Tutsi. And, insurgents were definitely among them taking up positions for later war, hiding themselves well in the countryside and forests; they were guerilla fighters on both sides, who felt they had a cause, many hidden and aided by sympathetic or intimidated countrymen. This raised some serious concerns about the welfare of our missionaries.

Q: How did you deal with the missionaries because often as I do these interviews they say, "Well the missionaries say they don't want help and they don't want to be bothered by the Americans," until all of a sudden they are in trouble and then they need it?

PERRY: Well, in both countries I stayed close to the missionaries, visiting them periodically at their various locations. I always invited them to celebrations at the Residence. In fact, I gave them permission to use the swimming pool on weekday afternoons, especially useful for families with small children in the close area. A great many of them were United Methodists and other Methodist groups, but there were also Baptists, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists and others - all really good people who contributed to the health and welfare of the people. I made it my business to go up country quite often, many times staying overnight. We would talk about our families, nothing to do with what the Government was doing or anything like that. The Embassy sometimes utilized the missionary radio bands for communicating with them and our Peace Corps volunteers when caution was to be used. The country was nervous and they needed to be aware to use caution. There was a great deal of cooperation between us on matters of security. Some lived just over the Burundi Border in Eastern Zaire, and were fiercely independent. They managed their own affairs, had their own airplanes and could get out if need be. But, they were rather fearless. Sometimes they would let us know of problems brewing, and if serious enough, they would travel to Bujumbura to take refuge. But, the majority were not intimidated by the local skirmishes and would remain in place to protect their holdings. They were not our informants, and we could not ask them officially to pass us information, but they would advise us of rumors or actual happenings for our follow-up.

Once, I received a call from a New York Missionary Diocese, to say their Burundi

members and some American missionaries were being mistreated in central Burundi. The military had allegedly invaded the sanctuary and were threatening the parishioners. They had reportedly cordoned off the missionary compound, and confined the group to a small area. The caller demanded that the American Embassy do something about it. I questioned why or how his members could reach him in New York, but couldn't get word to me just a few miles away.

The situation was indeed a serious one, if it had validity. As Ambassador, I was committed to the protection of American citizens in the country. While my staff prepared an official protest with government officials regarding the alleged incident, I pulled together two post security officers and a translator for a quick discussion of possible actions and outcomes. Then, we drove immediately up country, directly to the Governor's office (about 60 miles away) in a two-car caravan, the American standard flapping furiously in the wind. The Governor of this region, whom I had met previously, seemed to be expecting us, and received us quite graciously. Approaching the matter as gently as I might, I repeated the rumor I had received from the Diocese and the request from my government that I investigate the rumor. I spoke of my commitment and mandate to protect American citizens in the country from harassment and harm. He responded reproachingly, that members of the church were Burundian and it was his responsibility, not mine, to keep them from harm while maintaining peace and security in the community. He said, "Your government has no voice here; I checked and we don't have any of your people up here." I said, "Oh, yes, there are three." He said, "No, no, no, no. We only have one white woman up here, and she's British."

It was my turn to be belligerent. I said haughtily, "I hope you know that not all Americans are white. Look at me!" He said, "I never thought about it." He was terribly embarrassed. He and several of his officers accompanied me to the missionary compound, explaining along the way that a traitor with a cache of arms and ammunition had found refuge there. The police had unearthed the weapons, but could not find the man. They were trying to isolate the man within the compound and to force the missionaries to tell where they had hidden him.

He said, "I won't make that mistake again; we have no quarrel with the church or Americans and we will free your people. Understand that for our own national security, we must find the person who created our problems." They were immediately released, along with their members. In truth, two of the missionaries were Nigerian-born and in their fear, hadn't been able to convince their captors of their American citizenship. The other American girl looked like a Burundian. But the missionaries around the country learned of my intervention and they passed the word, "Our American Ambassador is fearless." Not so, but I didn't think I would be harmed for doing the right thing.

Q: What about the French? Were the French playing any role?

PERRY: Indeed. We had fights all over the place. Their real claim to the country was the language; they perceived the French language as their strength and basic claim to ownership of the country. Anything that was to be done in that country had to have the

approval of the French, rather than the Belgians. That was particularly galling to American business. Once, the Burundian government requested bids to build a telecommunications tower, at the tune of 40 million dollars or more. The French said that they would do it, and took it for granted a French company's bid would be honored. An American firm advised me they had also presented a proposal for the tower and sought my support. This was followed by a question from a government official as to whether I would support the American proposal. I argued that telecommunications was truly an American industry, and such expertise needed is normally best provided by those who know the technology. The government shortly after awarded the contract to the American company, whereupon the French ambassador advised the government that they would cut off a commensurate amount of their foreign aid if the contract were not awarded to the French firm. The Minister of Finance called me and said, "We refuse to be coerced by this threat. Your company has the contract." After that, the French Ambassador wouldn't speak to me. I became an enemy.

Q: Were the French doing anything in the way of support to the Hutus or Tutsis? Were they mixed up in this sort of thing?

PERRY: They were accused of being involved; e.g., supplying arms, training and information to the Tutsi army. Many of the Tutsi political groups were located in France and were reportedly receiving monies to promote the war. The former Tutsi president of Burundi was exiled in France and was reportedly involved with insurgent groups coming into the country. He also was said to have fostered divisive mischief among the Tutsi factions upon his pardon and return to Burundi.

Q: Later the French were accused of being staunch supporters of the Tutsis.

PERRY: It was that and the Catholic Church was also accused of the same. All of that put together. The French had a strong influence there, more than you might think since they did not colonize the country. It was actually the Belgian French, the Flemish, who colonized Burundi. The Belgians still had tight control of the economics, especially the coffee export; they were the staunchest trade partners in Burundi. One of the strangest encounters I had with the Belgian government, came about through a liaison between a Belgian citizen and a Burundian girl resulting in the birth of a little girl. They were never married. When the Belgian returned to Brussels, he decided he wanted that child and would go through the Belgian courts to get it. In the meantime, she married an American Peace Corps fellow, which brought me into the matter. Would you believe that top Belgian Ministers telephoned me repeatedly asking me to insist that the Burundian government release the child to her real father? I refused to take any action at all because the Burundian mother signed a statement saying she wished to keep her child. Washington asked for my opinion and judgment on the case, but left the decision in my hands. It was a complicated affair, but we stood our ground, and eventually managed to get both the mother and the baby to the States with the American husband, who insisted the child was his, at any rate. O for the advent of DNA testing.

Q: Why would an Ambassador get involved with such matters?

PERRY: No, they called it international kidnapping, which was prohibited by international law. I said, "Well, the U.S. is not signatory to that law." They insisted that the U.S. government had signed it. But, we had not.

Q: Also a man has no legal claim. When you left there, did you feel that the Hutus and Tutsis were going to go at each other again? Was it building up?

PERRY: Yes, there had been some serious skirmishes outside the main city, Bujumbura. I didn't want to leave the country because I had begun a series of dialogues between the government and the opposition groups which seemed to have some effect. I would like to have remained there until June of that year - 1993 - to continue these negotiations through the first democratic election. But, I was recalled in March. A replacement was not assigned for a whole year, after war had erupted.

I had a fortuitous and unexpected airport meeting in Addis Ababa with President Buyoya last November, and also spent an evening in South Africa with the director of the UN refugee program, who was from Burundi, and a number of his friends and relatives. They all brought me up on events that had taken place since I left Burundi. I feel deeply saddened that things I put in motion, which may have delayed or prevented the war, were not carried forward.

Q: What was the problem? Was it just that the Clinton Administration took a long time to get its act together or something like that?

PERRY: That was a contributing factor. A number of countries were placed on hold while the Clinton administration was getting its act together. In some cases, inexperienced people were sent to posts or actions were delayed by designating ambassadors who couldn't get through the Senate confirmation, that kind of thing. I think Burundi was one of the last posts to be considered and perhaps hardest to fill because of the unpredictable conditions of war. Senator Krueger was appointed Ambassador in 1994, when the war was at its most vicious height - after the assassination of the Hutu president and five of his Ministers - too late to effect any real change. It was a brutal war. I received many letters saying had I remained there, the war would not have happened. That broke my heart - surely they understood I had no choice in the matter with the change of administration. I doubt that I could have done more than to delay or postpone the inevitable. That may have given time for continued dialogue without violence. I feel that had the small interventions made during my tenure to support the basic democratic institutions been strengthened by the immediate arrival of a new Ambassador--prior to the first democratic election, before all hell broke loose--things would have been vastly different. Both sides would have done all they could to remain in the favor of the United States. That's what they wanted. And it didn't happen. Nobody seemed to care.

Q: What about social occasions? Was it difficult to get Hutus and Tutsis together?

PERRY: No. They would all come out, especially for American activities and

celebrations. To be invited to the American residence was very big thing, and most invitations were accepted. Our Fourth of July festivity would have 1,000 people and the overwhelming percentage would be Tutsis who represented the government primarily as well as local businesses. We made sure that numbers of prominent Hutus were invited. Social affairs put on by the government tended to have a good mixture of Hutus and Tutsis, but activities such as dinners tended to be somewhat exclusive. We felt very much at home there with either group.

Q: When you left there what have you since done?

PERRY: We came back to this house in Houston where we've lived for about 35 years. After about six months that it took to get my house back together, I began to look for ways to serve the community, to get back into the swing of things political and social. Our children were so happy we were back at home that they and their children virtually overwhelmed us for a while. Our six children produced eighteen grandchildren and we have nine or 10 great-grandchildren. Nine grandchildren live in Houston. I love my grandchildren, I just don't have to see them everyday.

Returning to Texas Southern University was an option that I wanted to pursue later. Ambassador Leonard Spearman, TSU's former president, returned from the field at the same time as I. He had a tenured position and returned to TSU until his retirement. But, I did not go back. However, I did some lecturing and consulting for them, and lots of public speaking throughout the State and the U.S. for public and private groups.

I decided to do a year of "pay back" while putting together a plan for the next five years of my life. I negotiated with the local school district to teach as a volunteer at a predominantly minority high school. I wanted to share with these kids the benefit of my long-term planning and diplomatic experience. I was posted at the only school they had with an international magnet program, teaching five back-to-back classes in ninth grade world geography; 80% of the students were Hispanic; half of them spoke no English at all. I enjoyed so much teaching about parts of the world they had never heard of and trying to bring it all together, developing map skills. I tried for one year to pass to them my own excitement about teaching and learning about the world. After one such lecture, the class applauded. I felt good. Then later I found out they hadn't understood half of what I said--they just loved the way I said it. That's what they told me. Their world was so full of drugs and gang violence, they couldn't be concerned about the rest of the world outside the barrio and ghetto. How could they pass the required Texas testing except by cheating. They couldn't read. Once I gave them a test just to see and I gave them alternate so they couldn't tell they weren't the same and by golly they cheated all over the classroom. I couldn't even tell who hadn't cheated. I stayed with Furr High School full-time for a year. It severely challenged my optimism about American education and totally drained my physical and creative energies. I'm glad I did it; perhaps I made a small difference in some young minds.

I accepted an appointment as honorary consul general for Senegal, and took on responsibility for Senegalese in Texas and the region. I became chairman of the Board of

the Houston International Festival focusing on Southern African cultures in 1999, and continue to serve on several international boards in the City of Houston.

I joined half-time an investment firm in Houston, FCA Corp, which in addition to its domestic programs, invests in the stock markets of Africa as well as other Regions. Over the past five years, I have been traveling for FCA around Africa, mostly the Southern Africa region, leading trade missions - and cultural missions for current clients to orient them to the market. We currently have substantial investments in Malawi, and others in Senegal, Zimbabwe and Zambia. We have recently brought more people and client companies into our investment group. We have developed a special outreach to minority investors, to try to encourage them to do more in Africa. Based on the level of our investments in a country, our company has seats on the boards of the larger companies. This is very rare I think for American companies doing business in Africa. The president of FCA, Rob Scharar, travels out periodically to attend these board meetings and is making a difference in the overall operation and management of the companies.

Q: Well, I thank you very much. This is great. Are you still looking if a George Bush, Jr. comes in?

PERRY: I fully support George W. and would serve wherever he asks. He appointed me, in fact, as Regent of Texas Woman's University and that keeps me busy all over the state. I am regularly up in Austin with the Legislature and have gotten to know many of the lawmakers. I am certain George W. will win the presidency. That certainly doesn't guarantee that I will be reposted. He will have many competent people to choose from, but I have made it known - just in case, that I would prefer not to be posted in Washington. Of all the places I have lived in this world, Washington was the fastest action and least enjoyable. But I would go out long-term as Ambassador, or short-term as an Advisor, wherever he would send me.

Q: Well, I thank you very much.

End of interview