

U.S. Ambassador Frank C. Urbancic interview with Ben Stousland

American International School of Cyprus

Nicosia, February 3, 2010

Ben Stousland: When is your birthday?

Amb. Urbancic: February 21st

Ben Stousland: Where did you grow up?

Amb. Urbancic: I grew up in a little town. Indianapolis is my town. That's where I was raised. I went all the way through high school there.

Ben Stousland: Did that place have any influence on your current career?

Amb. Urbancic : Yes it's funny; it did because I always wanted to get out of it. And so the farthest way you can get from Indianapolis was overseas. So I always wanted to go overseas.

Ben Stousland: Do you have any interests?

Amb. Urbancic: I do. We do a lot of politics, but I am also very interested in history and architecture. I like football. You may know that the Colts are in the Super bowl this Sunday and that they are going to win.

Ben Stousland: Did you have a role model in your life growing up?

Amb. Urbancic: I did, I had a lot. My dad of course was my biggest role model. He's the guy that taught me everything. But I also liked historical figures. I was very interested in ancient history and interested in the Roman Emperors and how they managed to bring together so many people and keep them flowing in a single direction. It's a fascinating thing for me. I was interested in some particular other sports. Athletes. Things like that.

Ben Stousland: What are some of the places that the U.S. government has brought you to?

Amb. Urbancic: You know I had a lot of travel. I could give you a list. But I can say that it is just about every Middle Eastern country. I have been to almost every Arab country. So that starts with Jordan and Tunisia, Abu Dhabi which is the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait. I've worked in India and Australia. And my first post was Canada. Quebec City, which is a French speaking country and so I used French when I was there.

Ben Stousland: Which country have you enjoyed the most?

Amb. Urbancic: You know, everyone of them is really interesting in its own way. Cyprus is fascinating because of where it is, because of the deep history it has. Sierra Leone was also fascinating. Sierra Leone is a country in West Africa. It's also fascinating because of the different kind of people and the different type of life they have. The beauty of the country, it's really quite extraordinary. The sea comes straight into the town, and then the mountain comes up and the town goes straight up the mountain. They get 90 inches of rain in one month, in July, which is the opposite of Cyprus of course. So they are all interesting in their own way. Canada was one of them.

Ben Stousland: How many years have you been a diplomat?

Amb. Urbancic: I joined the Foreign Service in 1981. I was in the first class under President Reagan. So that's 30 years.

Ben Stousland: Is there a specific reason why you wanted to become a government employee?

Amb. Urbancic: No in fact I can't explain. I never met a diplomat; I never met anybody that worked for the government, except my mother was in the post office. But I wanted to be in the Foreign Service. I was a student in France, so I suppose maybe that's what kicked me into it.

Ben Stousland: What are your benefits of being an Ambassador?

Amb. Urbancic: Benefits? You know, it's mostly work. The biggest benefit is that you meet interesting people all the time. You are always talking about issues that people are interested in. You meet people who have different things than you. I meet lots of businessmen, journalists, musicians, all kinds of people that have skills that I don't have. You get to learn from all of them about their lives and what brought them to Cyprus, or why they live in Cyprus, and what they do in Cyprus in the current case.

Ben Stousland: Is there a hardest about being an Ambassador?

Amb. Urbancic: Probably the hardest part is not getting too tired too fast and especially not overplaying your hands. If you have you want to look intelligent because you don't want to look stupid but at the same time nobody can know everything so you have to know when to ask questions, instead answering questions.

Ben Stousland: So kind of being modest?

Amb. Urbancic: I think it helps. Good Work.

Ben Stousland: What is your biggest accomplishment in your life?

Amb. Urbancic: In life it's my family. I have two kids and taking care of them that's the most important thing. After that my career is very important but everybody can live without their career, they can change careers.

Ben Stousland: Are you happy with your current position? Have you ever thought about a different career?

Amb. Urbancic: I thought about it, I've talked to a lot of people that I know that are in banking or in other types of business and while I think that would be interesting in many ways; I think that a lot of the excitement that you get as a diplomat would be absent. Of course you make more money in the private sector.

Ben Stousland: Where do you see yourself 5 – 10 years time from now?

Amb. Urbancic: It's impossible to know that. In our system we change every 3 years. So I have been here 18 months, so in 18 months I will be out of Cyprus, because 18 and 18 is 3 years. But where I go next I won't know. We'll start looking at that in the summer time. Our system we prepare to transfer one year in advance, so this summer will mark two years that I have been on the island and that's when I will start looking for the next assignment a year after that.

Ben Stousland: What advice could you give to a young person such as myself who is interested in pursuing a career in the U.S.? Government?

Amb. Urbancic: Probably you want to narrow it down a bit more. The U.S. government is a pretty big institution.

Ben Stousland: To being a diplomat.

Amb. Urbancic: Being a diplomat. Well get your grades up, be interested in international studies, but also not just international studies, life is much more than just politics. You do need to know about how the banking system works, you do need to know how business people operate in your country, you do need to know how the military work and you do need to know of course how international countries work together in places like the United Nations, but mostly be interested in other people and try to find ways to develop your interpersonal skills. Because at the end of the day, diplomacy is working with people. Almost any job is that. But it's critical for a diplomat.

Ben Stousland: Is there anything else you can say on being an Ambassador?

Amb. Urbancic: Well, I never wanted to be Ambassador actually. I joined the Foreign Service because as I said at the beginning, I wanted to be overseas and I wanted to come to know other cultures. But if you follow your heart and you do

what you are really interested in, in my opinion, you will do it well and if you do it well you will naturally advance. But keep your studies up.

Ambassador: I'm glad to meet with you today. Thank you very much for the opportunity to talk to you.