

## **KIT DOBELLE EXIT INTERVIEW**

This is an interview with Mrs. Kit Dobelle, January 14, 1981, in the East Wing.  
The interviewer is Marie Allen.

**MARIE ALLEN:** I heard you referred to Kit Dobelle. Is it Catherine, the full name?

**KIT DOBELLE:** No my real name is Edith, but no one's called me that since I was a very young child

**MARIE ALLEN:** How did the Kit originate?

**KIT DOBELLE:** I was named for my grandmother whose name is Edith and my parents didn't want any confusion when I was a child so I called myself E Kit and it just came from there.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Let's get back to personal background first. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

**KIT DOBELLE:** I was born outside New Haven, Connecticut. Both my parent's families had been in Connecticut for a very long time and I lived there all my life. I went to college in London, New Hampshire and then worked in Boston for three and one-half years and then went back to college and went to the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and came to Washington to work for a year and one-half.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Where were you working then?

**KIT DOBELLE:** I worked on a Ford Foundation grant in higher education while I was in Washington.

**MARIE ALLEN:** And then you went back to Massachusetts to meet your husband?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well I met my husband during the original time that I was in Boston. We met addressing envelopes in a political campaign.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Oh, for whom?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, it was a state representative candidate in Boston. It was a special election. I had gone to a cocktail party and met somebody by chance, and I don't know why I said it, but I said I'd always wanted to work in a political campaign. And it was January and I thought it was very safe to say that, but he

said if you're serious we're running someone in a special election and he gave me the address of where to come and help and I did.

I went down the next night and did telephoning and then later that week went to help address envelopes and that was where I met Evan, who was involved at that time working for Senator Brooke of Massachusetts who was running the first time for the senate, and Evan was helping with his campaign and he had also been asked just to come and address envelopes.

But, it was about five years after that that he and I were married. We stayed, both of us, involved in politics in Boston and after I came down here and he lived in Delaware for awhile and helped run a campaign for governor in Delaware and then we were married in June of 1970.

**MARIE ALLEN:** So the political bug, once you got started in that first campaign, you didn't quit then?

**KIT DOBELLE:** No, I worked in that campaign. After that, actually I ran for office myself in Massachusetts in Suffolk County which is Boston where [indiscernible] the towns around it.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Oh, what office were you [indiscernible]?

**KIT DOBELLE:** It was the Registrar of Probate and it was Evan who asked me to do it. There was an office that hadn't been contested in a number of years. There was an incumbent who had been there for a long time and it was -- it was a reform campaign to let people know about the office.

I was just 21 and it was a lot of fun. I had to get a thousand signatures to get on the ballot and go through that process and raise money and give speeches and interviews and things I had never done before. But he suggested I do it and got me involved and then he went out to run the western part of Massachusetts for Senator Brooke. And I didn't see him again until about October.

Meanwhile, I had had a really fascinating experience and there was never any expectation that I would win, but it was an opportunity to learn about politics full time, you know, first hand. I had to do things that I never would have anticipated.

But as a result of that I got to know people who were involved in the governor's campaign that year, his name was John Boulter [ph] and they asked me to help in their campaign and then I worked in his office after the election and by coincidence, Evan was also hired after the election by Governor Boulter [ph] and we were assigned to work in the same office and so we worked together there for awhile and then a friend of ours --

**MARIE ALLEN:** This is before you were married?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Before we were married, yeah. And then a friend of ours ran for mayor of Boston and we were both asked to leave and work in his campaign so we did that. And after that campaign was over, the fellow was not elected, and I decided to go back to school and that was when I went to the University of Massachusetts.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Which of you enjoys politics more do you think?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, Evan has been involved since he was 13, so it really is his life and I knew that when I -- all the time that I've known him, I've always known that he would be involved in politics. He always talked about running one day himself and so I had an advantage over most people who married people who were involved in politics.

I was involved myself and often people fear it, and we don't. They prefer that their husbands not be involved, but I just accepted it was part of his life and I had the advantage of having been involved too so I didn't worry about it.

After we were married we lived in California for nine months. He was doing research on a Masters in Education and after we came back he went back to work in Boston. He ran Senator's Brooke's Boston office and I worked for the State Department of Education in Massachusetts.

And then after we were there for a year and one-half we went back to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, which is his home and he ran for mayor. It was in 1973. He ran and was elected mayor that year. And then in November of 1975, he was re-elected. And we just settled in, we thought that life would be very quiet for the next couple of years. He had just been re-elected and he knew the job and things were going along fairly smoothly.

In January of '76 he was told that Jimmy Carter would be coming to Pittsfield to campaign in the Massachusetts primary, before he had won any other caucuses or primaries and I had read an article about him and was very interested.

Evan went to meet him because that's what mayors do; you meet people that are coming into town. So Evan met him at the airport and I went to the reception afterwards. We were both extremely taken by him personally and thought that he should be president.

**MARIE ALLEN:** What was it, do you remember, what were the qualities?

**KIT DOBELLE:** It was the, first of all I agreed with everything that he said, but there was a personal quality. There was caring. I had seen, having campaigned myself so much, and knowing what it is like to shake hands with hundreds of

people and to keep smiling and to act interested in everything that is going on, is very hard to do.

And yet, one of the first things that you are aware of is whether or not someone is genuine and so often you can go down a line and somebody shaking hands and looking in another direction and there was just, President Carter has a way of whatever it is he is dealing with, that's the most important thing to him at that moment, and there's a personal quality that you can't help but be aware of.

And I think that particularly when you have been in that situation yourself and you know how very difficult it is to really care after awhile about people that you are meeting and seeing very, very briefly.

And we had a sense that he should be president, not any real -- there was no logical reason to believe that he would be but it was, I had a strange sensation because when Evan started running, so many people had helped him that really had no -- there was no logical reason for them to believe that he would win, or no real explanation of why they were supporting him. It was just they felt that was what they wanted to do and I had no way to thank them for what they had done.

It's a very -- when someone comes and supports you for an office like that, it's such a strange feeling that people would give of themselves to help you. It's good government too but it's something that's very hard to explain.

And I felt that the only way that I could repay this was to help someone else that I felt should be elected and needed help. And when he spoke, I remember turning to somebody saying that he was running for president the same way Evan had run for mayor. It was just going around talking to small groups of people and I didn't see how you could do that for president.

It was, in a city of 60,000, you can meet enough people so that you can get elected that way, but Jimmy Carter did it nationwide, particularly in the states with early primaries.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Evan was then was very active in campaigning wasn't he?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Yes, he traveled, gave speeches and we both went up the primary in New Hampshire. We worked up there and in Florida. Evan went to Florida and I went to Pennsylvania and stayed with relatives for two weeks and worked in one of the headquarters. And then I went to Maryland and stayed with friends in Maryland and Evan got very involved with the arrangements for the convention in New York since we were fairly close to New York.

Along this [indiscernible] we started going to New York every weekend. He was involved with the hotels and Madison Square Garden and arrangements and then we both worked during the week of the convention at the convention --

**MARIE ALLEN:** Did you and Evan ever have a title in the campaign?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Not really. He was still mayor for the town, so it was when he could get away and it worked out that he could do it on weekends. He worked with the people who did arrangements for the convention. And during the convention itself, I worked in the suite where the Carters were staying, with people who were coming in and out and got to know them more during that time.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Did you get to know the First Lady for the first time?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, she came to Pittsfield one time and campaigned along in March before the primary. She came on Sunday morning and that was the first time that I met her. I rode with her in the car and talked with her.

**MARIE ALLEN:** There must have been an instant rapport?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, I felt as if she was somebody -- she was a very easy person to feel that you do know and to get to know and she's just a very natural person to talk with.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Do you have any special memories of that convention time? Were there moments of strain and uncertainty that you remember?

**KIT DOBELLE:** No, by the time it got to the convention, everything was really pretty well set. I remember clearly that the President was still interviewing people for Vice President, people were coming in to see him. One came in on a Sunday afternoon when I first went up to the suite, one came in and Mrs. Carter was having coffee with the wife of the gentleman, and when the President left to go back to have a private conversation, Miss Lillian, the President's mother came in and they were talking.

Rosalind introduced me to Miss Lillian and said this is Kit Dobelle. Her husband is mayor of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. I looked at her and I said aren't you wonderful. How could she possibly remember that? And she said ever since I met Evan, I've been seeing him everywhere. She saw him often during her travels.

I expressed surprise that she would remember our really very brief encounter. She looked at me as if she was very annoyed that I would think she didn't remember and she said you had a reception for me and she must have had five thousand receptions around the country, but they both have the quality of remembering names.

And actually, our reception was on a Sunday morning and it was so difficult to get a crowd together that morning that we asked all of our friends. We told them it

was a special favor, to please come and see her. And it was pouring rain, it couldn't have been worse weather. March can be very difficult in that part of New England, but of course, everybody now is very grateful that we insisted they come, but it wasn't a large crowd. And so when I told Evan she remembered, he said I hope she has it confused with somebody else's reception because --

**MARIE ALLEN:** After the convention what did you do during the campaign?

**KIT DOBELLE:** I traveled with Karen Carter who was married to Jeff at that time and expecting a baby. I was called the day before Labor Day and asked if I could [indiscernible] would be in upstate New York, the first week of New York, could I go to meet her.

And I had never met her, but I said that I was happy to do it so I flew to Syracuse, went up to Buffalo and went up into Vermont. We stopped in Albany and then went up into Vermont. Then I took her to the airport at the end of the week.

It was one of those things that we never met, but the first people that we stayed with, we stayed in private homes all during the time, hadn't been told by the campaign to expect anyone traveling with her and we were met at the airport and taken to their house and up on the [indiscernible] they were redoing their house and all they had was a 3/4 bed. They didn't say anything, they just took our luggage up. Karen was expecting a baby so you get to know somebody pretty quickly when --

**MARIE ALLEN:** Oh, no.

**KIT DOBELLE:** -- you stay in close quarters. But we traveled together that week and then the campaign called and asked if I would go to Florida with her the next week and it just turned into a situation where we traveled together every week during the campaign.

**MARIE ALLEN:** What types of responsibilities did you have while you were doing that?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, there was somebody in Atlanta who was responsible for her schedule, and I would spend a lot of time on the phone with that person, and we would be given her schedule, and we'd be met at the airport by someone and, we'd just review the schedule, and I was made to do whatever --

**MARIE ALLEN:** Did you have to write speeches for her?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, she had a basic speech that she gave on most occasions. It would be altered depending on the circumstances and I would find out what the events were going to be so that we had as much information as we could about what to expect.

I would deal with whoever the people were who were arranging to make sure that everything was kept on schedule and that she didn't get exhausted. Actually, in the beginning people weren't aware of the fact that she was expecting a baby so it was a lot easier once they knew she was pregnant because in the beginning they just thought I was a little mean because I would always insist she go to bed and the doctors weren't really happy about her traveling right at the beginning of her pregnancy. I was always ordering milk for her and sending it over to her. Other people thought I was a little crazy.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Did you have any particular problems you remember with the schedule and the events during that time?

**KIT DOBELLE:** I remember things going along very smoothly but we had the luxury of not having -- we had some press, but we didn't have security and we didn't have the logistical problems that most of the other parts of the campaign had at that time. We were sent mostly to smaller communities. We often would fly into a state and travel by car throughout the state. As long as there was always somebody to meet us and -- as I remember it, we usually didn't have our schedule too far in advance.

We wouldn't often know from one day to the next exactly where we were going. And there was the problem of tickets and reservations and that sort of logistical. I remember that twice during the time our luggage was lost and mine was always found. Both times it was Karen's luggage that was lost. It didn't matter that I wore the same dress for a couple of days in a row, but I felt badly about that. But that was really the most difficult thing for me.

**MARIE ALLEN:** What do you remember about election night for you? Were you [indiscernible] in Atlanta [indiscernible]?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Yes, we came down -- I had been traveling with Karen all that week and we were in Texas -- in Dallas the Sunday before the election the whole Carter family got together in Dallas and went to church together. And then she and I stopped, and on Monday we went to Louisiana and to Mississippi and Alabama and flew into Atlanta on election eve.

That was the time that it really hit me what was happening because when she was met at the plane in Atlanta by security and, you know, really you could tell that suddenly there was a change in the whole atmosphere, that suddenly there was the realization that she might really be part of a family that [indiscernible] was President of the United States and have the security meet her. It was something that very much struck me, that I stayed in Atlanta that Monday and then Evan came down and we were [indiscernible] down there for election night.

I just remember it being a very long night. Early in the evening it seemed as if things were going very well, very smoothly, and it was, everybody was sort of casual about it, but then the night kept getting longer and longer and longer.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Were you working up in the suite with the President-elect?

**KIT DOBELLE:** No, it was a situation where the hotel was just very crowded and everybody was -- it started out with kind of parties in different suites that people were in and most people were in the hall most of the time, just trying to make the time go by and trying to keep up on all the news that was coming in. It's something of a haze.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Was the Chief of Protocol job the first job that Evan had in the administration?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Yes.

**MARIE ALLEN:** How did it come about?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, it was something we really had not expected to come to Washington. It wasn't something that we had looked to do or wanted to do particularly.

We had both worked in Washington at different times in our lives previously and during July --- at the time of the convention Evan was asked by Governor Dukakis, who was then governor of Massachusetts, if he would become Commissioner of Environmental Management for the State of Massachusetts. Evan said that he was involved with the campaign and he wouldn't be able to take on additional responsibilities during the period of the campaign but that he would do it after the election.

And so, when we left Atlanta the day after the election we went back to Pittsfield. Evan had previously -- in October, he had announced that he was resigning as mayor right after the election and going to Boston to be Commissioner of Environmental Management. And that's what he did.

It was interesting that when we asked for support the previous January for Jimmy Carter, the press thought we were crazy at that time. You know why would you be involved with an obscure candidate for president and then when he started winning primaries everyone said, of course, we did it so we'd be the one to go to Washington.

But it really wasn't in our minds, it wasn't something that we -- winning was such a long way off and it really wasn't part of our -- because it hadn't been part of our initial thinking when it was such a long shot that it just never really came into our thinking. Eventually, we thought that maybe sometime during the four years that



it would be nice to come to Washington for [indiscernible] time, but we really weren't -- we didn't have anything particularly in mind that we wanted to do in Washington. And so it wasn't something that we were focusing on.

**MARIE ALLEN:** When did the call come?

**KIT DOBELLE:** We came down -- we came to the inauguration and while we were at the ball, Evan had a call from Hamilton Jordan [ph] and when we got back he called the White House operator just to let them know that he had returned the call. And the next morning Hamilton's office called and asked if he would come up and see him.

**MARIE ALLEN:** And had-- was the Chief of Protocol job one discussed or were there other positions --

**KIT DOBELLE:** No, he asked him if he would like to serve the President as Chief of Protocol.

**MARIE ALLEN:** What was that experience like for you because both of you were involved in that position.

**KIT DOBELLE:** Yes, well we came down the next Tuesday the President wanted to see us -- he asked to see both of us and he asked me if I would help him. He said it was a job for two people.

So it was -- we moved to Washington on the 10th of February and on the 13th of February, we went to Williamsburg to meet President [indiscernible] of Mexico and his wife. They flew in, and often state visitors come into Williamsburg first and rest a night before they come to Washington. Many of them do it, not all of them, but it happens quite often.

We got involved right away. The week after that Prime Minister Trudeau and his wife came to Washington so we had visits immediately. And fortunately, the Office of Protocol is an office that operates from administration to administration. There are a number of people that stay on, that have been there for many, many years and they had the first two visits arranged and we walked through the process --

**MARIE ALLEN:** What is the responsibility for that office for a state visit?

**KIT DOBELLE:** As soon as the President issues an invitation and it is accepted and dates are determined for the foreign leader, the Chief of Protocol would call the ambassador to Washington from that country. We would sit down and discuss the details of the visit and the expectations on both sides. It had to be determined whether it was an official visit or a private visit.

If it was the Presidential invitation then it would be official but, whether they were going to stay just in Washington or if they would travel around the country. Some people are invited to travel around the country on an official basis and there are certain aspects of the state visit, or official visit that are more or less set.

There's an arrival ceremony and the Secretary of State has a luncheon at the State Department, the wife of the Secretary of State has a luncheon of the wife of the visitor. They stay at Blair house. They have a state dinner here in the evening. They have a second visit -- office meeting with the President and they very often go up to meet with the Foreign Relations Committee, either senate or the house or both.

**MARIE ALLEN:** And the central coordinating person for all of these activities is the Chief of Protocol.

**KIT DOBELLE:** Yes. The country officers and the embassy personnel and the various people in the state department are involved obviously with the substantive matters of the visit, but in terms of coordinating the logistical arrangement of the trip, it's done in the Office of Protocol.

There is a visit section and once I would meet with the ambassador and then we would start having meetings. The ambassador would assign people from his embassy to work out the details and there would start to be regular meetings with the people in the Office of Protocol and the embassy people.

Some countries would send an advance team in to go through the arrangements and then we would work with the advance team. One of the earliest things that you have to figure out is who from the visiting country is in charge because sometimes it's the ambassador in Washington. Sometimes it is someone from the advance team, sometimes it is very difficult to figure out.

You know everybody acts as if they are in charge and you can never act as if you don't think somebody is but you have to find that someone who has the answers and sometimes that can be very hard.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Someone who actually has the authority from the Chief of State --

**KIT DOBELLE:** Yes.

**MARIE ALLEN:** -- [indiscernible]

**KIT DOBELLE:** Yes.

**MARIE ALLEN:** What are some particular events or visits that stick out in your mind?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, I remember the early ones just because we were so new and then -- we had about 30 state and official visits that first year so the first year of any administration is very very busy.

And then I tend to remember the ones during the time -- Evan served for a year and then the President asked him to become treasurer of the Democratic Party. He asked me to take his place. Then I remember more particularly the visits that I was responsible for during the time that I was Chief of Protocol.

The first one was the President of Zambia and then Prime Minister [indiscernible] of India came very soon after that. I traveled around the country with him. You tend to remember the ones that you traveled around the country with because you got to know them so much better.

Once you leave Washington, things aren't nearly as official and they are invited to fly on an Air Force plane and we would spend a great deal of time with them and their party and get to know them as people.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Was there one visit in particular that you were particularly proud of -- the complexity [indiscernible].

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, the whole -- during the whole time that I was Chief of Protocol, one of the major responsibilities was, the President was meeting very often with President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin in the whole process of the Middle East talks. They both came the first year of the administration and then came back again to visit.

I went to the Middle East with the President when he went. I was at Camp David for the two weeks that they were negotiating there. And I was very involved during the peace treaty signing. We had to make all the arrangements for that. I did the introducing of the various articles of the treaty that they were signing.

**MARIE ALLEN:** When you were at Camp David, what were your responsibilities there?

**KIT DOBELLE:** We worked with the advance parties, took them up there, from both countries to arrange where everybody would stay, what all of the logistical arrangements would be and it was difficult because the camp really wasn't designed to house three separate but equal parties. And the Americans lost in that bargain because whenever the Egyptians or Israelis would want something more in the way of accommodations, more of the American party would end up in the barracks because, of course, we wanted them to be as comfortable as possible. So it was making the early arrangements with them and working that all out and there was a lot to do with the food.

The Israeli party -- we had kosher food for the Israeli party. President Sadat has his own cook that prepares all of his meals but the rest of the Egyptian party were happy to eat whatever was available. But that all had to be worked out.

Then during the time that we were there, actually making sure that all the -- by then we had all gotten to know each other so well, even the Egyptians and Israelis had gotten to know each other pretty well because they had been involved in a lot of these meetings and there were a lot of people who had come prepared to be involved in doing a lot of negotiating, when in reality, most of the negotiating was between President Carter, Prime Minister Begin and President Sadat. And the foreign ministers were quite involved too.

But there were large numbers of the negotiating teams that weren't as busy as they might have anticipated being. So it was really a matter of helping them fill that time. They always had to be available for a meeting.

Actually, I remember we spent hours at Camp David trying to find a round table that was large enough for the three sides to sit at, each of them having a certain number of people that they would be able to -- to sit and negotiate with. The conference room at Camp David has a very long table with plenty of room, but it's a rectangular table and it's very difficult to sit three parties at a rectangular table and have everybody have the proper protocol position.

And we finally had worked it out -- we had worked out a space for a round table that would hold not the optimum number, but a sufficient number. [indiscernible] the table was never used because they never sat down for one session all together.

But it was really a matter of making sure that they were all comfortable during the time because the ones that weren't that busy had -- they really weren't all that happy about being at Camp David at that period of time. It became two weeks and no one was sure exactly how long it would last. Every day I would walk around and people would say are we leaving? You know, when do we go home?

**MARIE ALLEN:** What did you find for them to do?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, there were lots of movies and eating. It became like camp in that meals became very important and I still see some people who were up there and they tell me that they gained ten pounds during the time of those talks that they have never been able to get rid of because the food is the same as the mess food here, lots of pies and cakes and everything had ice cream on it and it got to be a joke. It wasn't whether or not you were going to have dessert, but whether or not you were going to have ice cream on the dessert. Everyone would sit down and eat three full meals --

**MARIE ALLEN:** Without a lot of activity.

**KIT DOBELLE:** Without a lot -- you know, there was tennis and riding bikes, but it isn't really a place that there's a lot to do.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Did you have any protocol details to work out or did you find those people who knew [indiscernible]?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, there wasn't a lot of actual protocol. It was fairly relaxed. They ate in the dining room together. That was worked out -- we just had to determine about the -- we had to determine a way of making sure that there were kosher meals available for who asked for them. It was a little bit hard on the kitchen because they knew exactly how many that was going to be.

Also, Mrs. Begin was there and I spent quite a bit of time with her -- I'd spent a lot of time with her on her visits and --

**MARIE ALLEN:** Mrs. Sadat was not there?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Mrs. Sadat did not come.

**MARIE ALLEN:** What struck you about Mrs. Begin? What do you remember about her?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Mrs. Begin is a very down-to-earth woman who always speaks her mind and you know just what she thinks about everything. But I enjoyed her very much because she told me a lot of stories about Prime Minister Begin in his early years and it was so many years that he was involved before he was in a position of power.

He had been the opposition person for many many years and during the period of time that Israel was being founded he was in hiding much of the time and she often didn't know where he was. She talked about hiding him in her home for days when the children didn't know that he was there because there were guards outside wanting to arrest him and they couldn't tell the children that he was in the house because they might let on.

You know, they were experiences of her life that -- during the number of times -- she and I spent quite a bit of time together, traveling around in cars in Washington and traveling around the country and then when we went to Israel, we'd see her and then the time at Camp David. She spent a fair amount of time with Mrs. Carter at Camp David. They had a couple of outings together and --

**MARIE ALLEN:** I was going to ask you next, what were your responsibilities with Mrs. Carter in the Camp David process?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, she and I -- we spent some time together. I remember that sometimes we'd all get sort of nervous and used little things to help the time go because there wasn't anything that you could do about the talks. I remember she called one night and said come over and she and Susan [indiscernible] and I watched Dr. Zhivago. It was great because it was so long it took two nights. We couldn't watch it all in one night, so really it helped the time go by.

I remember lots of personal things about the different participants. One night we were watching a very silly movie in one of the lodges that somebody had suggested. There was a whole list of movies that were available and somebody had suggested it. It was -- nobody was particularly enjoying it. It was a stupid movie but it wasn't so bad that you'd leave.

Prime Minister Begin and his party came in and sat down and everybody was embarrassed that they were watching this stupid movie. We offered to turn it off and put on something else, but he said no, no anything was fine. It was about half over at that point, that anything was fine. He didn't care. So he sat down on the couch next to me and he sat there and next thing I knew he was asleep on my shoulder.

And Jody Powell was sitting on the other side of him and Jody was very nicely trying to explain to Prime Minister Begin what was happening in the movie, who people were and I wanted to tell Jody that it was useless, but if I said shhh, Jody would just think that I was tired of listening to him. And he was doing such a wonderful job of making sense out of this movie.

**MARIE ALLEN:** He couldn't -- he didn't realize that he was asleep.

**KIT DOBELLE:** He didn't realize that he was asleep. It was dark, and I only realized it because he was laying on my shoulder and poor Jody was going on and describing everything so beautifully and Prime Minister Begin was sound asleep. There were things like that that were --

**MARIE ALLEN:** Did you get a feeling for Mrs. Carter's feelings during that period? Was she anxious about the talks?

**KIT DOBELLE:** You couldn't be there and not be anxious. I think in the beginning everyone kind of went along and there were talks and everybody felt good about things. But as time went on, you really couldn't help but be interested -- everybody was involved and yet the talks were among such a small number of people who were the ones who were really involved that, you were there and you were a part of it and you want everything to go well, but it was hard to, it was just hard to know how long it would last and what to look for in terms of good signs and it --

**MARIE ALLEN:** Do you remember the last day when you discovered that there was going to be an agreement?

**KIT DOBELLE:** I remember that very clearly. The night before we were sitting around, wondering, everybody had one, of course, when do we leave was the question and someone came in that had gone to a briefing that Secretary Vance had given and Secretary Vance said that definitely the negotiations would go on until midnight, on Sunday night. There was no way that they could end before that.

So everyone decided that there was no sense in getting up early the next morning because we wondered -- the evacuation of the camp, and moving, the logistics of moving everyone from Camp David was a concern, very much the concern of protocol and we never knew how much time we would have to arrange for that. So, we stayed up late that night and decided we didn't need to worry about it till first thing the next morning.

But early the next morning Mrs. Carter called me and said that she was coming in to Washington because Shastakovich was, had a concert here at the White House that Sunday afternoon and she asked if I would bring Mrs. Begin in, ask Mrs. Begin if she'd like to come in and go to it. Mrs. Carter said she was going in early in the morning because she had another appointment here in the morning.

So I went to see Mrs. Begin and asked her if she'd like to come and she said she'd very much like to. When I, as I walked around the camp, I found out that there was a possibility the talks would end that day but I really couldn't talk about it and I had the awkward situation of telling Mrs. Begin it might be a good idea to pack her bags.

But it wasn't sure enough to suggest that she bring them with her. I packed my own suitcases before I left and she and I came into Washington.

I was told to call Camp David as soon as the concert was over and they would let me know if I should bring her back or not because you know her travels would be very visible. People would be very aware of what she was doing and that would be an indication. Of course the press was all hanging on every possibility.

I called after the concert and they said to call back in half an hour and then call back in ten minutes. I was talking to Phil Wise [ph] during that time. I kept calling and Mrs. Begin was getting a little anxious because she was just assuming that she was supposed to go back to Camp David and she was saying can we go now and I'd say just a few more minutes.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Without giving a reason?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Without giving a reason. Fortunately, she's a flexible person. I think a lot of other people would have just thought that I was crazy. But finally, I took her upstairs to the second floor to the residence and asked Mrs. Vance to go and sit and talk with her while I kept making these phone calls.

I think it got to the point that the reception after the concert was over and then the word came that they would be coming back -- first the word came that it would be awhile before they would know for sure and I couldn't keep Mrs. Begin any longer without discussing it with her.

I told her the situation and [indiscernible] Dennis [ph] who was the wife of the Israeli ambassador at that time. Well, see, I'd asked both the Israeli and Egyptian ambassadors' wives, who had been invited to the concert, I asked them if they would just stay around for awhile.

It got to the point that they were the only ones who hadn't left and I couldn't discuss it with them why, but just please don't leave. Then Mrs. [indiscernible] was there and I asked her if she would take Mrs. Begin back to the residence and I would call her as soon as I had any news. It was all -- fortunately we had all spent so much time together and everyone understood that there was a delicate situation because ordinarily it would have been very awkward.

But the minute we got the word that they were coming back and there was an agreement, then we had to make the arrangements for the signing ceremony that evening.

The East Wing had all been set up for the Shostakovich concert that evening and there was quite a lot of technical details in terms of television and so forth, but my concern was the seating, the inviting and seating of people.

**MARIE ALLEN:** That was a pretty difficult guest list to come up with?

**KIT DOBELLE:** It had to be done so quickly. By then it was about -- by the time we knew, it must have been 6:00 in the evening and they were coming back, I believe, at 9:00. It was a matter of trying to call people to reach them and have them come and of course the [indiscernible] were coming back from Camp David. They were going to helicopter in. And then other people, the social office was calling the cabinet and White House staff to let them know to come.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Had you, did you have a prearranged list of people that you would invite?

**KIT DOBELLE:** We didn't. We really hadn't made any provisions for that.

**MARIE ALLEN:** So who decided who should come?



**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, it was unfortunately when, I sat up in Gretchen's office, she and I sat together and tried to think of people that should be invited and should be there. And there were a number of them that I called, some were home and some weren't. It was one of the most [indiscernible].

And then we had cards; we had to do the seating. It's always difficult when you have three negotiating teams and doing the seating and we had whole sections reserved and then the cabinet and senior staff of the White House arrived and they all brought their families.

Everybody brought -- anybody who was around when they got the phone call they brought them with them. And so many more people came than we had ever anticipated and the hard thing was trying to save the seats for the parties that were coming back from Camp David because, of course, they were coming in at the last minute and there was a lot of fumbling around for seats at that point.

[End side 1.]

**KIT DOBELLE:** Fortunately, it was a bit of, everybody had gotten to know each other so well that people were not shy about coming up and saying that they were unhappy about something. And it's so much easier if somebody will tell you what their preferences are and what they think should be accomplished.

**MARIE ALLEN:** In the job as Chief of Protocol and particularly that night, you had the opportunity to get in touch with and to meet some of the leading people in this country, on capital hill, and foreign relations field. Are there some people that particularly stick out in your mind?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, I would get to know well the ambassadors in Washington. Aside from arranging for the state and official visits, the Chief of Protocol is also the person who represents the government to the embassies. If they have problems they bring them to the Chief of Protocol, problems with the DC government, zoning problems, parking problems.

If they've contracted with somebody and felt that the contract hasn't been lived up to, they often complain and also complaints are registered against foreign diplomats to the Office of Protocol. It's the liaison, the person between the diplomatic community and the government in this country and also the people.

Not as strongly as it is in many countries. In many countries you can't make an appointment. A diplomat can't make an appointment with anybody in government without going through the Chief of Protocol.

Well, that's totally unworkable in the size of our government and the size of the diplomatic community. There are 135 countries credited to Washington, with ambassadors credited to Washington so it's so large that you could never do

that. And yet, they focus on the Office of Protocol as the place they go with their concerns and you get to know these people very well, particularly during business.

And it's really one of the nicest things about the job is that the ambassadors that are appointed to Washington are usually some of the top people in their country. It is one of the highest honors in their country to be appointed to be Ambassador to Washington. And many of them have been foreign ministers in their governments or will be when they leave Washington or they are -- they're outstanding people and it's one of the nicest things about the job is that you get to know some very fine people, very nice people.

They are generally professional diplomats who have had all kinds of exciting experiences in their lives, very full lives. And once you've gone through a visit with them you become very close because that is probably one of the hottest spots for them to be in, is to be the ambassador when their head of state comes to Washington.

And it's very important to them that everything go very smoothly so they look very much to the Office of Protocol to be the -- we really become their benefactors in many ways and it was one of the things about the job that surprised me the most is how often we would get put in the middle between the several representatives of the visiting country. They often would have different opinions of what should be done. They would often be struggling for influence within their government, trying to do something that would make them look good in the eyes of their head of state.

And they often would come to us to say, you know forget about this other person, which was very often I found the foreign minister. They don't know anything. Listen to me, I'm the one with the answers and asking really for favors for things to help things go smoothly for them and it was very awkward to sort that out.

**MARIE ALLEN:** How often do you deal with that?

**KIT DOBELLE:** It depends upon the circumstances. You would try to get a sense right away of what the head of state himself or herself wanted, what their own wishes were, who they wished to respond to, how involved they wanted to be in the details of the visit.

That varied tremendously from visitor to visitor. I was often so amazed that the chiefs of state would deal with me directly on so many details of their visit. It would be unthinkable when President Carter or any American President traveled abroad that they would deal with a foreign Chief of Protocol because the decisions about the visit are negotiated out and it's their scheduling people and their advance people who would do this.

Several visitors would become annoyed with me about their schedule. They would say, you know, you made my schedule too complicated. Well, their schedule was always determined by very strong negotiating on all sides. It had been agreed to by, we thought, by everyone concerned. But then I would be in a situation saying you can do whatever you want to and we will change your schedule knowing that I would then have to go back to their people and say that their boss wanted a change made which put them in an awkward situation.

So I'd have to respond to the wishes of the head of state, but also deal with the sensitivities of his own people who had made the decisions and some way thought they had cleared it with him because I didn't want to get them in difficulty.

I was always surprised when that happened, that they would come to me to make changes in their schedule that they -- rather than turn to their own aids. I was pleased that they would feel that comfortable with me so quickly that they felt that I was the one to worry about it, but it always kind of amused me.

**MARIE ALLEN:** When was it that you first discussed with the First Lady coming to her staff? How did their job for you come about?

**KIT DOBELLE:** One of the things that I did while Evan was Chief of Protocol and while I was, was be involved with her travel abroad. She had called me in the spring of '77 and asked me come to -- and asked me to do both the advance work and also travel with her when she went to Latin America on her trip. So, I was very involved with that trip.

**MARIE ALLEN:** She must have heard good recommendations from Karen Carter.

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, I got to know Mrs. Carter too when we came to Washington, during all the official visits. She always did something with the wife of a state visitor. Well, she'd always plan something, she always wanted to know what they were interested in and plan something special for them and spend time with them. The wives all appreciated it so much because it was a real opportunity to know her and to feel that there was a real relationship.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Was this unusual?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, I don't know exactly what was done in the past. It was something she indicated right away that she wanted to do and I think that the wives have always spent time together. But, I think it may in the past have been more in terms of official luncheons and things where it's harder to get to know someone. But she would take people to places in Washington or have an event for them here.

I remember with Mrs. Sadat she invited people in Washington who were top people in fields that Mrs. Sadat was particularly interested in. They had a very small tea and were able to talk about what each person did and how it related to what Mrs. Sadat was interested in and the kinds of things Mrs. Carter did. It was real professionals talking among themselves about what could be done in their own situation. She always wanted to work that out, so I got to know her during that process.

And also when President Carter traveled when Evan was Chief of Protocol, I went and handled the gifts so we both were able to go on the overseas trips and I got to know her pretty well.

**MARIE ALLEN:** So your first real experience with having a responsibility for the First Lady though, the lengthy one, was with the Latin American trip?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Yes. I went on an advance trip and was responsible for matters of protocol which involved all the official functions of every country that had an arrival ceremony. You have to find out exactly what they have in mind, what they would like Mrs. Carter to do.

Generally, host countries dictate the arrival ceremonies. They have things they do traditionally and how they were going to -- each of them had to decide how they were going to receive Mrs. Carter because she's not a head-of-state or head-of-government, but they did receive her with military honors in all of the countries that we visited.

Then there were state dinners in all of the countries, official dinners, and then the arrangements of where she would stay and the schedule that she would have while she was in that country. I met with all the chiefs of protocol in Latin American countries and talked with them about the exchange of gifts and the ceremonial parts of the business.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Well, what -- at this time you were not working in the East Wing?

**KIT DOBELLE:** No. At that time Evan was Chief of Protocol and I went as the wife of Chief of Protocol.

**MARIE ALLEN:** How did it come about that you made a switch to the East Wing?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, I traveled with her on that occasion and also when President Carter made all of his trips abroad. And then in the summer a year ago she was asked to go to Ecuador, to the inauguration of the new President of Ecuador. And at that time I was Chief of Protocol and I accompanied her. And it

was on that trip that she talked with me and asked if I would come over to direct the staff in the East Wing.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Were there particular things she wanted you to do in that job? What was the idea that she had for the position?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, she wanted someone to have a role coordinating responsibility for the office. And she [indiscernible] had always traveled a great deal during the time that she was [indiscernible] and she had to be away for a certain amount of time. Mary Hart always traveled with her and she really wanted someone to be able to coordinate the office whether she was here or not. It would be an ongoing person to be here.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Was it a coordination role also with the West Wing, with the President's staff?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Yes, and also by a [indiscernible] coordinating role I had gotten to know all of the people in the West Wing during the time as Chief of Protocol and worked very closely with them.

And, so it wasn't a matter of coming in and developing relationships. I already had them. I knew who did what and why and had an easy rapport with them. There had traditionally been problems of communication between East and West Wings. It was a way of having, making sure we were making use of all the resources of the White House for her various activities and also that they weren't [indiscernible] about what we were doing.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Did you attend the weekly staff meetings?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Yes, they became daily senior staff meetings.

**MARIE ALLEN:** And you attended those?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Yes.

**MARIE ALLEN:** How did the, what are you particularly proud of as far as the job in the East Wing? As part of the coordination role, do you feel that things have changed?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, I've been pleased that a lot of people in the White House have told me that communications are easier, that they know who to get in touch with. Often they wouldn't know who to be in touch with about what and they know that they can get in touch with me and I can get it worked out for them. So I guess I'm most pleased that so many people have told me that they've appreciated me being here.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Have you stopped your traveling though now? Has this been a land-based role now for you?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, to some extent. I haven't traveled within the country during the time that I've been here, but Mrs. Carter went to Thailand in October a year ago to visit Cambodian refugee camps on the border of Thailand. So we flew to Bangkok and that was something that was decided very quickly and we got in the air on very, very short notice and went over and had one of those experiences that nobody who was involved will ever forget of visiting the camps and also visiting the king and queen of Thailand.

They had a tea for her. And visiting the reception center in Bangkok where the refugees come in from Cambodia and there were many who over the years have come from Laos. And then when they are ready to be resettled in another country, when they are ready to leave Thailand they come into Bangkok and go through the final process and we visited that center as well and that was in many ways more upsetting than the camps because the reception center is only designed for someone to be there for a couple of days but often there is some snag right at the end and they are forced to stay there for many weeks and in some cases months.

If there's a medical problem the conditions were even worse than some refugee camps and the frustration that people must feel when they move to that step, they naturally felt that the end was almost in sight and they were almost on their way to a new life. And then to be held up there for different bureaucratic reasons was very, very frustrating.

**MARIE ALLEN:** I understand that Madeline MacBean has a role as a very personal assistant to the First Lady. Would you describe how your role perhaps compares with that of Madeline?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Madeline has worked with Mrs. Carter since President Carter was first elected governor of Georgia and over the years they've developed a very close working relationship. Madeline handles personal details, family details. She works with -- Madeline is the person everybody in the family and all their old friends know is somebody that they can get in touch with and deal on any personal detail.

My role is really in coordinating the office and making sure that all the people here are communicating with each other and communicating with the rest of the White House.

**MARIE ALLEN:** You've gotten to know this First Lady very well in the last four years. How would you characterize Rosalind Carter as First Lady?

**KIT DOBELLE:** It's so hard to separate Rosalind Carter as First Lady and Rosalind Carter as friend and very real person. I guess when I see her I think of her as a person, but a person that I've been so very proud of having seen her in so many circumstances here and abroad when she always rose to every occasion and handled herself in a way that you couldn't help but be extremely proud of.

The negotiations with the ladies in Latin America, and carrying through the ceremonial details and the relationships that she established with foreign visitors that I would see in a first-hand way and the way she always -- regardless of what else was going on, Amy was always her main concern.

She always wants to know when Amy is coming home from school and her family matters were always right there. The way that she was able to combine all of that and still be the same very real person that I met the first day that I saw her in Pittsfield. She hasn't changed at all basically from that time. We've all had so many experiences we never could have dreamed of, but she's a person who under -- she has roots and she doesn't change with different circumstances.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Have you seen in the last year with this last campaign a particular strain on her?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, the traveling was a tremendous strain. She was traveling a great deal. She had traveled of course during the earlier campaign, but this time she had so much more press and the security and the crowds.

It was a tremendous strain. It had to be on anyone. It had all changed so much because she was attracting very large crowds and for all the period that the President wasn't able to travel, she was often the person that the press corps would go to to get a sense of what was happening with the President, with the campaign.

You know whatever she said had the very strong possibility of being on the news that evening and she always handled herself so well there was never a time when she said something that people wished she hadn't or she didn't answer a question -- she had just the right way of putting it.

When you think of the number of months that she was under that kind of scrutiny, that kind of focus, it would be a feat for anyone to have been able to accomplish. She was very aware of all the issues -- she was in a situation where people were asking her about all the substantive issues in the government and she would respond about them.

It was a very long campaign because she started in -- very soon after I came here she started in late September of '79. There was a lot of -- there were a lot of fund raising activities throughout that fall getting the campaign started.

**MARIE ALLEN:** That would be a very long time to be on the road.

**KIT DOBELLE:** Yes.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Is there something, I've come to the end of the questions I was planning to ask you, but is there anything that you'd like to say that we haven't talked about so far?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, I guess I, one of the other ways that I got to know Mrs. Carter was that during the first conversation that Evan and I had with President Carter about Evan being Chief of Protocol, Evan said that he and I would like to learn a foreign language. And the President said, "Oh, well, Rosalind is going to study Spanish, why don't you study with her?"

So after our talk with the President, we came over here and talked with Rosalind. And Evan said the President said we should study Spanish with you. And she said, "Oh, that would be great." She and Gay Vance, Secretary Vance's wife were going to study Spanish.

So Evan started but he really only came one or two times. When you are working full time there really wasn't time to do it, but we studied Spanish in the solarium in the residence and Karen was here at that time and Gay Vance and I. We met three mornings a week from 9:00 to 12:00 and it was really, probably the most relaxing time for everybody concerned. It was wonderful because it was fun and --

**MARIE ALLEN:** Who was teaching you?

**KIT DOBELLE:** He was an instructor from the Foreign Service Institute and it was --

**MARIE ALLEN:** Did you all progress?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Yes, well --

**MARIE ALLEN:** Did any of you progress more than others?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, actually the most serious, Rosalind was the most serious student. It was always embarrassing for me because I had a lot of receptions and dinners and things to go to with the diplomatic committee being so large. And when you first come into a job like that you really have to go to everything to get to know people.

So I was very busy in the evening, but not nearly as busy as she was and she was doing a fair amount of traveling, but she was always totally prepared. She



always had done her homework and I thought sometimes I had a good excuse for not doing it, but she never -- I mean if she was traveling she'd get up at 6:00 in the morning and do it. She is very serious about anything like that that she takes on.

I wanted the ability to be able to speak Spanish and be able to communicate when we traveled in Spanish-speaking countries. Of course, I didn't realize that I would so soon be going to Latin America and I was awfully glad that I did learn Spanish.

**MARIE ALLEN:** What you had learned was useful then?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Yes, yes. And since then, well last summer we went to Peru again. Peru was part of the original trip, but she was asked to come back for the inauguration of the new President of Peru.

In both Ecuador and Peru, when we went there were military governments that were in the process of return to civilian government. They were planning elections. She went at a time when she encouraged that process and later when both governments did elect civilian governments. In both cases, the president-elect of the new country asked that she come down and represent our government.

And both paid tribute to her during her visits, of the role that she had played and the encouragement that she personally -- in representing the President and our government, had given. So the impact of her visit was felt very much in the countries involved and she still hears from people in those countries and who appreciate what she did

**MARIE ALLEN:** And she did have special interest in that part of the world?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Yes.

**MARIE ALLEN:** You've been in a unique situation since you and your husband both are very much involved in Washington political government life. Has that been largely a plus or have there been minuses, or how would you describe the fact that your marriage has also been involved with your job?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, I've had a situation that, Evan has always encouraged my involvement. He encouraged my involvement when he was Chief of Protocol. He would be the one who would suggest that I go on trips and he would ask me, when he couldn't do something to represent him. I went to Cyprus when Archbishop Makarios died, accompanying the delegation, representing him.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Not a conservative husband with the old traditional views.

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, he is conservative about our personal life and he does have traditional views but he also -- he has always been the one from the very first time that I met him when he encouraged me to run for office. He has always encouraged me to do things that I probably would not have thought of doing myself or that I would not have pushed myself to do. But he will get me into situations that once -- I can't say no to.

It was he who encouraged me to -- when we came to Washington, I really wasn't looking to work full time. I was very happy with the role that I had. My feeling was that I got to have all the fun of the visits and the trips and not the real responsibility of putting them together.

As I became more comfortable with it, I realized that I could handle the responsibility. But I never really, being Chief of Protocol myself wasn't something that I anticipated happening or ever would have focused on.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Were you the first woman in that position?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Shirley Temple Black was President Ford's Chief of Protocol, and she served for about six months after -- it was from about July of 1976 until the inauguration of President Carter.

**MARIE ALLEN:** What else how would you describe -- has it been mostly a plus then [indiscernible] you encouraged each other?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Well, we both looked upon it as an experience that was a part of our lives, a very exciting time in our lives, but not a way of life forever. And because we knew that it was a temporary period we wanted to enjoy it as much and have all the experiences we could.

Neither of us had ever traveled very much abroad so the opportunity to really see the world was something that we both did as much as we could and encouraged each other to do. It -- I think that particularly because Evan's job, he's been involved the last three years in raising money for the Democratic Party and for the President's committee for reelection. He's had to travel a great deal.

I have been busier, longer hours and traveled more than I would probably choose to do as a general way of life but because he's been gone so much it has been very good that I was as busy as I was because it would -- if he had a normal job and were at home regular hours, then I would have been more tied up here than I would really want to be.

But, he was traveling politically at such a fast pace that it really wouldn't be much fun to go with him and so it was a good time in my life to be as busy as I have been and to have the travel that I did.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Where are you going now? What are your plans?

**KIT DOBELLE:** Our home is in Pittsfield, Massachusetts and we plan to go back there. I think it's very important to have a home. Washington is great and I hope that one day we'll come back, but in the meantime we'd like to be home.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Do you think you'll stay in politics? There'll be more offices to run for?

**KIT DOBELLE:** I'm sure that we will never be very far away from politics in one way or another.

**MARIE ALLEN:** Thank you for taking the time and making this contribution to the library.

**KIT DOBELLE:** [indiscernible]

[End of tape.]