

MARTHA CAMPBELL, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO
THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS



*An
Informal Exit
Interview*

WITH JAMIE ZVIRZDIN

I first met Ambassador Campbell back in Washington, D.C.; she had traveled there for a meeting, and since my husband, Andrew, had just been assigned to the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), she invited us to meet with her in the EAP (East Asian and Pacific Affairs) offices. Since there are only four Foreign Service officers in the RMI, including the Ambassador, it is highly advisable to be on good terms with each other. We then joined her for lunch and she was even able to come for part of my husband's swearing-in ceremony. I appreciated this outreach, since I had heard that many Ambassadors barely look at first-tour officers. When we arrived on the Majuro Atoll a few months later, Ambassador Campbell greeted us at the airport with leis made of vibrantly pink, fragrant plumeria blossoms—blossoms that had been taken from one of the trees on the Embassy grounds and made into leis by one of the locally employed staff members. Everything else was a blur after that, but I do remember the Ambassador later giving us a tour of the eastern half of Majuro. Because Majuro only has one main road, it was a pretty straightforward tour, but the Ambassador was able to point out the flame trees (stunning tropical trees with fern-like leaves and magnificent red or orange flowers), locally painted Marshallese murals, and various shops and restaurants around town that she liked.

Since that time I have found out more about Ambassador Campbell: she has been a career member of the U.S. Foreign Service for 32 years, and she was sworn in as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of the Marshall Islands on August 21, 2009. Before she became Ambassador to the RMI, she was a Dean at the Foreign Service Institute. She received her bachelor's degree from Kalamazoo College in Michigan and her master's degree in Modern European History from the University of Notre Dame. Her husband of forty years, Arnold Campbell, is a retired Foreign Service officer who still serves, as needed, at Embassies around the world. On a more personal level, she is a wickedly competitive tennis player, she has very complex signs and signals during the game Charades, she won't put up with nonsense or dilly-dallying (especially on the tennis court), and she loves a good laugh.

Ambassador Campbell is leaving the RMI this week, and as I wanted to thank her for the wonderful service she has given and the kindness she has

shown to me and to my family, I invited her to participate in an informal exit interview about her life in the Foreign Service. As an “Eligible Family Member” (EFM) of a first-tour economic officer, I have been fortunate to glean information about this new life in the Foreign Service from Ambassador Campbell, and I believe others can benefit from her experience. I have appreciated her candor and honesty as well as her example to other women in the country. In fact, when we first arrived on Majuro Atoll, many people in my church congregation thought *I* was the new Ambassador because they had seen me walk out of the Embassy (the church is located within sight of the Embassy’s front gate). This rumor continued for many months, but because of the language barrier I was completely oblivious to it. While the mistake was funny (and perhaps the reason I received so much deference at church!), to me it indicates how Ambassador Campbell’s presence has influenced and will continue to influence how the Marshallese view women, at the very least American women: that they are all potential Ambassadors and have an equal chance to be thought of as such. I am grateful to belong to a country where women have that opportunity, and I am grateful to Ambassador Campbell for representing that country.

Please enjoy this informal exit interview with Ambassador Martha Campbell.

—JAMIE ZVIRZDIN

Jamie Zvirzdin is a writer, typesetter, and graphic designer with particular interests in experimental literature and interactive media. She is the creator of The Unbound Bookmaker Project and acts as an external consultant for Atomium Culture, an international non-profit research dissemination organization based in Brussels.

Where have you been posted in your Foreign Service career and what were your jobs in each of those places?

ON MAJURO ATOLL IN THE
REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS



Martha and Arnold Campbell

Why should U.S. citizens spend their tax money on diplomats?

What has been the best part of the Foreign Service?
The worst?

What do you feel have been your greatest contributions to the Foreign Service?



Coming aboard the USCGC Jarvis

Do you have any fun or embarrassing gaffs you would like to share?

How has it been being a tandem couple in the Foreign Service?

About twenty years ago, from 1987 to 1989, you opened the Office of the U.S. Representative in the Marshall Islands, and now you've been the Ambassador here for the last three years. What changed in the Marshall Islands over those twenty years? What stayed the same?



RMI President Christopher Loek with Ambassador Campbell



Ambassador Campbell with Colonel Joseph Gaines, Commander of the U.S. Army on Kwajalein Atoll (USAKA)

If someone insults you to your face, how would you respond?

Do you have a favorite diplomatic phrase you use to ease tensions?



A good-will game of softball between the RMI government and the Embassies of Taiwan, Japan, and the United States



Ambassador Campbell welcoming staff to the Embassy's Christmas party

What have you done for fun during your tours?

What is your favorite movie?

What is your favorite food?

What is your favorite book?



Yuko Carey and Serge Cahigeo prepare for lunch at the Embassy outing on Eneko

Ambassador Campbell with Iroj Mike Kabua and Deputy Assistant Secretary Frankie Reed on Ebeye (Kwajalein Atoll)



Ambassador Campbell at a Christmas party with Al Fowler, Tom Maus, and Fred Reichard (Santa)



Have you
come up
against any
discrimination
as a female
Foreign
Service
Officer?



Ambassador Campbell with a rescue helicopter on the USCGC Jarvis

A farewell party with members of Women United in the Marshall Islands (WUTMI)



Casey Richards, Ambassador Campbell, and Jamie Zvirzdin show their Marshallese bling for a Women's Athletic Club (WAC) party

You've given advice for officers in the Foreign Service; do you have any advice for Eligible Family Members (EFMs)?

What will you do in retirement?

Copyright © 2012 by Jamie Zvirzdin

Photos Collected by Casey Richards and Yuko Carey
Technical Assistance by Eric Johnson