

L. Francis Rooney III

A leader on the homefront at Manhattan Construction and former U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican.

Chapter 01—0:59

Introduction

Announcer: L. Francis Rooney III is the fourth generation of his family to own Manhattan Construction Company. Manhattan was founded by Laurence H. Rooney in Chandler in Oklahoma Territory in 1896. As the first company to incorporate in 1907 in Oklahoma, Manhattan played an important role in building the Southwest. Manhattan Construction with its headquarters in Tulsa, Oklahoma has built Cowboy Stadium in Texas, the U.S. Capitol Visitors Center at the United States Capitol, the Oklahoma State Capitol, the George Bush Presidential Library and the George W. Bush presidential library. Manhattan is the only construction company to work on two presidential libraries.

Francis Rooney is a former United States Ambassador to the Holy See having served from 2005-2008.

Listen to Francis Rooney talk about Manhattan Construction Company and his service as United States Ambassador to the Holy See on *VoicesofOklahoma.com*.

Chapter 02—7:55

Muskogee to D. C.

John Erling: My name is John Erling and today's date is May 18, 2015. Francis, would you state your full name, please?

Francis Rooney: My full name is Lawrence Francis Rooney III, but I go by Francis Rooney.

JE: And your date of birth?

FR: December 4, 1953.

JE: Your present age would be?

FR: Sixty-three.

JE: Tell us where we're recording this interview.

FR: At our corporate headquarters of Manhattan Construction Company here in Tulsa.

JE: Where were you born?

FR: I was born at St. Johns Hospital in Tulsa, but my family lived in Muskogee.

JE: And the reason for that?

FR: Oh, my father didn't the doctors in Muskogee were as good as the doctors up here.

JE: Okay. Your mother's name?

FR: My mother's name was Lucy Turner Rooney.

JE: Tell us a bit about her, where she was from, where she grew up.

FR: Mom grew up in Pensacola, Florida, from a family of two brothers and her. And her father, my grandfather, was from Pensacola, Florida, and had eleven brothers and sisters, all of whom were from Pensacola, Florida. His father was from Pensacola, Florida. They go way back there.

JE: What was her personality like?

FR: Mom was a real southern belle, she was a real party organizer and a very warm person. Had a lot of friends, did a lot of community activities here with the opera and things like that.

JE: You learned some of those traits from her?

FR: I think so. Mom was very outgoing and loved people, had a lot of friends, and never met a stranger. Real southern kind of person. I think I got a lot from my mother, yeah.

JE: Brothers and sisters that you would have?

FR: I have two sisters and three brothers.

JE: And the birth order, where are you?

FR: I'm the oldest.

JE: Your father's name?

FR: My father was also named Lawrence Francis Rooney. He went by Larry.

JE: So he would be the Second?

FR: He would be.

JE: Lawrence Francis Rooney II. Tell us about where he came from, where he grew up.

FR: He grew up in Muskogee because my grandfather had moved over to Muskogee with his father after the company got going in the early 1900s.

JE: Describe his personality.

FR: He was a warm person and very clear-speaking and very clear-thinking.

JE: So he—

FR: And he was a stern dad, a stern father. Of course, back then, I think, fathers were generally more stern than maybe this generation of fathers, I'm not sure.

JE: Did he push you a lot? Did he expect high standards?

FR: He, both of my parents expected high standards of us, I mean, it was routine torture to go over the quarterly grades when they came home.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

FR: And have a fairly thorough analysis of performance and how it could be improved. They had high expectations for all six of us.

JE: So that was good?

FR: Oh yeah it was good and I think it worked out all. We all did well in school and everybody did well in college and is gainfully employed and things like that.

JE: Your education, you began in elementary in Muskogee?

FR: I did. At Sacred Heart grade school, the same one Jim Jones attended.

JE: The former congressman Jim Jones?

FR: Uh-huh (agreement). It's an interesting story. His father, Pat, headed up the VFW Post in Muskogee, and used to come and give out our awards to us every year at the end of the year at Sacred Heart.

JE: And you've been in touch and you share—

FR: Oh yeah.

JE: ...camaraderie with him?

FR: Jim's a great friend. He's a wonderful public servant. He was a great ambassador to Mexico. Led the stock exchange, he's one Oklahoman that's had one of the most important careers of any Oklahoman I've ever met.

JE: And we have interviewed him for this website.

FR: Oh good.

JE: So you can listen to his story on *VoicesofOklahoma.com*.

FR: Great.

JE: So then you're in junior high and high school—

FR: Junior high in Muskogee and high school I went away to a Jesuit high school in Maryland called Georgetown Prep. All six of us kids went away to high school.

JE: To that same high school?

FR: No. Two brothers went to Prep, one went to Shaddock in Minnesota, which is where my father and uncle had gone. And the two girls went to St. Mary's Hall in San Antonio.

JE: The Georgetown Prep School, was that a good experience for you?

FR: Oh yeah, it was great. It was great to get out of Oklahoma and see the world a little bit. The schools in Muskogee were not very good and were deteriorating. You know, there were things going on at that time involving where people went to school, busing, etcetera. A lot of turmoil with the public schools at that time. So that's why my parents sent us away.

JE: So they were preparing you for anything in life at that prep school? A general education?

FR: Yeah. One of my brothers got an engineering degree but the rest of us all had a liberal arts. And I think my parents emphasized reading and liberal arts a lot when we were

kids. They were avid readers, read a lot of history, they traveled a lot, and so the liberal arts is a foundation for a balanced education. It was a big part of our family ethic.

JE: How much social activities did you have at Georgetown Prep School?

FR: Well, fair bit, I mean, it was just like going to school anywhere else. It was just that I was boarder instead of living in our house. About half the school was boarders and half the school were people that lived in the Virginia/Maryland/Washington area. So it was a fantastic experience because I had friends all over the town. We were always going to their house for events, spend the night, etcetera, and got to know the area well. I mean, I know Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, as well as I know Tulsa.

JE: Did you get involved in school newspapers?

FR: I did, I was involved in the school newspaper and I was involved in wrestling and a little bit in football.

JE: Then you're on to your further education, which happens where?

FR: Georgetown University.

JE: And that would be in 19—?

FR: '71.

JE: And you would graduate then in '75?

FR: In '75. I applied early, got in, came home for Thanksgiving and told my parents I was going to Georgetown. They never even asked one word about college, where I was going to apply, or anything.

JE: Was that kind of strange?

FR: Yeah, I thought so, but I didn't need a lot of handholding, you know. But, I mean, yeah.

JE: Well, they knew you were on the right track.

FR: Yeah, but most people dig into helping their kids apply and figure out where they want to go. Just never came up.

JE: Was that a natural though to go from Georgetown Prep to Georgetown University? Most kids probably—

FR: Well, I guess I'm just resistant to change and I'm a creature of comfort and habit. I knew the area and, really, I love Washington and had spent a lot of time on the campus of Georgetown and so felt very familiar there.

In fact, I was on the campus of Georgetown one day when there were two tanks on the campus of Georgetown and teargas everywhere. It was at the time of the Mayday demonstrations. I think it was 1969, the antiwar demonstrations.

JE: You were quite young at that time, but—

FR: Yeah, sophomore, junior, yeah.

JE: So that had to leave quite an impression on you.

FR: Very interesting, very interesting. The whole first floor of the Healy building, was kind of the main building at Georgetown, was full of hippies camping out, sleeping on blankets, you know, the National Guard was chasing people around and a lot of teargas. This was the time when the nuns put chicken blood on the front door of Dow Chemicals, Washington office and all those kind of antiwar things.

JE: And the war was Vietnam?

FR: Yes.

JE: What were your feelings about all that then? Did you want to join them? Or were you looking—

FR: No I was pretty conservative about that. And I read a fair bit about it, for a young person, obviously you don't know that much when you're that age. But felt that, really, the hegemonic pursuit by the Communist Block was something was something that we had to face. Now maybe Vietnam, in hindsight, wasn't the best case for it and maybe we didn't prosecute the war as well as we should have, but it did start the containment of communism. And that was an important thing.

JE: So then as a young man seeing that, you didn't get involved in any of the demonstrations or anything?

FR: No.

JE: You just—

FR: Uh-uh (negative), Young Republicans group.

JE: That's it?

FR: Yeah, that one. Even despite the fact that we had the Nixon turmoil during college there.

JE: You were a member then of the Young Republicans Group?

FR: At Georgetown, sure.

JE: What did that do for you? How did that help you?

FR: Well, Georgetown was pretty conservative back then. They had a pretty strong political Young Republicans club. And, of course, being in Washington the school's very politically oriented. There's speakers coming all the time. I mean, I can't tell you how many politicians and world leaders we'd heard at Gaston Hall, which was a unique attribute of the school being located in Washington, DC, as well as being able to access things like protests or supreme court cases or going to congress. All the different kind of unique things you can do when you're in Washington, DC. We took advantage of that in high school and college.

JE: So then your law degree comes from?

FR: Georgetown University. I'm really a creature of habit. I'm a very change resistant individual, I guess.

JE: But you enjoyed it there—

FR: Loved it.

JE: ...obviously.

FR: Oh loved it. I didn't really like practicing law that much but I really enjoyed law school. Enjoyed Constitutional Law, had some great teachers. You know, being again in Washington you had access to people like Bob Pitofsky, the famous antitrust lawyer who headed up the FTC.

I had access to a guy named Ruff, who was at the time was one of the leading prosecutors in the country.

Sam Dash, taught criminal law when he wasn't prosecuting Watergate people. I mean, it was a pretty fascinating time to be around Washington during those years.

Chapter 03—2:30

Bellmon and Humphrey

John Erling: Anybody else that you can think of? Names that really impressed you? You know, sometimes we hear speeches and comments from people that stay with us forever. Any of those moments that happened there at Georgetown?

Francis Rooney: I don't know that I would say any particular verbiage but I definitely remember Hubert Humphrey coming to speak at Gaston Hall. I remember Ted Kennedy coming to speak. Bill Buckley, I introduced Bill Buckley one time when he came to speak at a student gathering.

JE: What was he like, 'cause you had to see him be a personal—

FR: Oh he was great. Bill Buckley, he was a great guy. He was a sailor. I got to know him pretty well. We had him come to Tulsa one time to speak to our local YPO chapter. The kids and I picked him up at the airport, but we had a lot in common because he loved the sea, loved to sail, loved boats.

JE: I'm from Minnesota, North Dakota, so Hubert Humphrey was really big up there when I lived up there. Did you see him close?

FR: I did.

JE: And there was something charismatic about him, wasn't there?

FR: There was. Something interesting was my junior and senior year of college I got to work for Henry Bellmon as an intern. And Bellmon was very close to Hubert Humphrey, personally. He just thought he was a good guy. So I got to know a lot of the sinners that were Bellmon's best friends, as well as the ones that were Dewey Bartlett's best friends, because Bartlett's a close family friend. So I got access to a lot of people there. Enjoyed the work quite a bit too.

JE: Isn't that something in this day and age that if we don't agree politically somehow we can't become friends either. But here's Henry Bellmon enjoying the company of a Hubert Humphrey. And they were—

FR: This was a time of much less partisanship. I mean, it's always partisan, okay? Because you have differences of opinion about which way the country should go. And people who usually run for these offices and take that beating feel very strong about their opinions. That's what, I guess, sustains them to do that.

But there was a personal chemistry that was different. People, first of all, most of them lived there instead of commuting back and forth as much as they do, so they had times to build personal relationships.

I know David Boren had a lot of really good Republican friends, certainly a lot of Republicans did and still do think the world of David Boren.

Same with Sam Nunn, who was a very close friend of David's. Got to know him a little bit through David Boren.

You know, Bellmon's best friends were Pete Domenici and Hubert Humphrey.

JE: Not to pursue this too much but Hubert Humphrey is so outgoing and Bellmon is kind of to himself, and that these two guys would be friends, it's kind of interesting.

FR: Yeah it is interesting. I'll tell you a story. One time when I was there Bellmon said, "I want you to come down to the office Saturday morning."

And I thought, "Oh boy, I really screwed something up. He's going to run me off and Dad's going to be all upset."

He'd been given a desk by the OSU shop people and he said, "Well, you're a carpenter, right? Can you help me put this thing together?" So he got some tools and I came down Saturday morning and put the desk together for him.

Chapter 04—3:40

Hammer and Nails

John Erling: And that is an interesting question about you in this construction business. Were you good with your hands?

Francis Rooney: Yeah. And one thing I did, I went through the Union Apprenticeship Program starting when I was sixteen. That's the soonest you could do it back then. Now I think you have to be eighteen because of OSHA. Went all through the four-year apprenticeship program where they teach you how to build stairs and rafters and use a framing square and how to be safe with skill saws and drills. You know, I worked for the company all those summers building

forms and pouring concrete, using a level to lay out and get things in the right place.

JE: So then there were those that when you became in executive positions they also knew that he can do some of these things himself.

FR: Yeah. Dad was a big believer in hard labor. All the boys, we all worked construction. One of my brothers also worked on the ranch hauling hay too, which I never had to do that, fortunately. But we all worked a lot of construction. I worked a couple of years in Houston and one of my brothers worked in Houston one year with me. I worked in Oklahoma City one summer on Presbyterian Hospital.

JE: Back—

FR: If you ever find yourself in the morgue at Presbyterian Hospital and lean on a wall, that's a concrete wall that I built.

JE: All right. Uh, back to being an intern for Henry Bellmon, where you an intern for anybody else? Did you do any other Washington—

FR: Just Henry Bellmon.

JE: For a couple of—

FR: Two years.

JE: Two years?

FR: And then I had the first year of law school, which, as you have probably heard, is pretty intense the first year. But then the second year was not so intense. I went back to work on the Hill. I went to work for Senator Hugh Scott, who had been the senate minority leader from Pennsylvania, really nice guy. And he left the senate, and I went with him, and went to a new office of the Philadelphia law firm, the new Washington office.

It was very interesting, it was Senator Scott, it was a guy named Hendershot that had been the county attorney or city prosecutor in Philadelphia, and the brother of Alex Haley, who had just written *Roots*. That was pretty famous back then. I think his brother, I think his brother's name was Charles. Anyway, he was the third lawyer in the office. So these three lawyers, all very interesting people, and me.

JE: So how did that work out?

FR: Oh it was great, it was fun. Senator Scott used to have these partners meetings up in Philadelphia every couple of months and I'd go up with him on the train to meet some of the folks in Philadelphia. And it was very interesting.

JE: You were around all these political people, did you think that one day you would want to be a politico yourself?

FR: No. I always thought that I would be interested in the issues and in policy and in trying to impact things. But not necessarily to run myself. I just never really thought that it would be interesting to spend that much time trying to raise money. The more I've been around it the less I like the idea of personally running. I'm kind of private, really. But I've always ever

since college wanted to be involved in the policy side of things, especially foreign policy and where the country is going and why we do the things we do. Helping good candidates is one way to exercise public servants without actually running yourself.

JE: I'm sure you've been asked many times to run for office. And that was an easy no, was it?

FR: That was an easy no. I've been asked a time or two by people that really don't understand my strengths and weaknesses, otherwise they wouldn't do it.

JE: So what is your weakness?

FR: I just really would probably never have the discipline to stay out on the campaign trail as hard as these people have to do. It's nice to have personal time, it's nice to read a book, I'm reading *The Next Decade* by George Friedman right now. He wrote *The Next 100 Years* a couple of years ago. I'm usually always reading one book in Spanish, either Carlos Fuentes or Gabriel Garcia Marquez or Vargas Llosa or somebody like that.

You know, I would never have the discipline to just go 100 percent onto the campaign trail.

JE: All right. Then about reading and you're so busy, when do you find time for reading?

FR: Well, I read three hours yesterday.

JE: Do you read three hours during the day or when do you do it?

FR: Last evening before dinner and after dinner.

JE: So it's an evening activity?

FR: Instead of watching TV I read. I read on airplanes.

JE: A lot of people say they don't have time but I guess you can cut out TV to do that, can't you?

FR: Airplanes are a great place to read.

Chapter 05—3:40

Majority Owner

John Erling: Somewhere along the line you must have met a young lady by the name of Kathleen.

Francis Rooney: Oh yes. At Georgetown.

JE: Which Georgetown?

FR: Well, she was undergraduate in the foreign service school and I was at the law school.

JE: And so was it love at first sight? How did that work out?

FR: Yes. Kathleen was living with a series of girls. What a lot of people do at Georgetown is you'll rent these townhouses that have four or five bedrooms and you'll get five or six kids living in one. Kathleen was living with three or four of her friends on 33rd Street and I was living with three or four of my friends on N Street, which is right around the corner. So

one of my roommates was dating one of hers, and that's why we met. And then I chased her until she married me.

JE: And she still hasn't said yes, right?

FR: Well, she did get monogrammed towels after we'd been married about seven years. I kind of felt like getting vested in the profit sharing plan.

JE: And—

FR: We have our thirty-seventh anniversary this August.

JE: Where is Kathleen from, originally?

FR: Chicago.

JE: Children from your marriage?

FR: We have three; our oldest son, Larry, is here. We have two grandbabies, and he works for the company in the Tulsa office.

Second son, Michael, is an attorney with the Notre Dame Law. Spent five-plus years with Jones, Day, and international law firm in Washington doing international law. And he, about a year ago, came to work for us as our general counsel. He's based in Washington.

And then our daughter, Kathleen, who went to business school at Georgetown after college and worked for Jim Inhofe for a while, and Mel Martinez before that, is now working in our real estate development business in the Washington/Virginia/Maryland area.

JE: After you graduated from law school, what happens to you?

FR: I went to Houston to practice with a small firm that did a lot of financial and international transaction law. And Kathleen went to work on George H. W. Bush's campaign in '78. The campaign that went through the Iowa Primary, which he won, but then he got trussed in New Hampshire and the rest is history with Reagan.

So I've been practicing, I guess, maybe a year and a half or so maybe when my dad got cancer. And they gave him five weeks to live.

So about the time that Mr. Bush dropped out of the campaign we moved back to Tulsa, in February of 1980. And went to work for the construction business there out on the city service project. I don't know what it is now. It's kind of an office park, different offices are in there. Across from Quik Trip. Remember the City Services Technologies building?

JE: Right. You served as CEO of Rooney Holdings, an investment and holding company?

FR: Yes. After Dad died in October of 1980, we divided up our family's stuff. Uncle John's family and Dad's family, where they were 50/50 partners in most everything. One of the things that we took was the construction company. And my brother Tim and I bought the family out of the construction company.

It was a really difficult time, if you remember 1984, after the Penn Square Bank fail in 1982, etcetera, and the company had a lot of trouble or pretty much broke. It was a really bad thing for my mother to be in. It had bonding requirements where you have to

guarantee financially. I didn't want her doing that. And my little sister was still only like eleven when my dad died.

So, Timothy and I bought it out and reorganized it. We set up a holding company to own it. Then we have the flexibility to have some of the company guys be shareholders of it, so Timothy and I would have the holding company doing the best of it.

JE: So is it true then today you are the majority owner of Manhattan Construction Company?

FR: I am. My brother Tim was my minority partner. He wanted to get out, I think it was, in 2002 or 2003. I ran the company from when we bought everybody out in '84 till about 1996 or '97. Then Tim ran it from then until we bought him out in 2003, I believe it was.

JE: You're the fourth generation of your family, then, to own the company?

FR: Yeah, well, I guess you could say the kids are the fifth now, because really, they own most of it, when you get right down to it.

JE: Okay.

Chapter 06—6:10

Manhattan

John Erling: Let's go back to the beginning. Tell the story of Manhattan. First of all, the name "Manhattan"?

Francis Rooney: That's a subject of a lot of different stories, and I'm not 100 percent sure which one would be accurate. What's in the manuscript that Bob Blackburn has researched is that there was a Manhattan Construction Company of New York established by a man named Loomin who was from Atlanta in the northeast. And he came out to Oklahoma seeking construction work and met my grandfather in Chandler, and they became partners. That's how the company got going in Oklahoma in 1896.

Then in 1907, along about that time, I think Loomin died and Granddad bought him out. And they incorporated the company in Oklahoma in December 1907, one month after it became a state. It's the first corporate charter issued by the state of Oklahoma.

JE: So then Lawrence H. Rooney, your great grandfather, begins the company in 1896?

FR: Yes. He had a partner, Mr. Loomin, at the time, for a few years.

JE: That was then Oklahoma Territory, and the charter was out of New York.

FR: Right.

JE: He had another business though other than construction.

FR: He did, he was in a few things in Chandler. He was kind of an entrepreneur. He was in the concrete business and I think he had a dry goods store, something like that. I know he

got involved with the local bank in Chandler and got to be friends with the Hightowers, who ended up founding the First National Bank of Oklahoma City. Granddad was on that board for years and used to have a fairly sizeable stock position in it.

JE: I think it was about a year before the first ever commercial oil well was drilled in Oklahoma, three years before the Oklahoma Land Run, that he had started then Manhattan Construction Company. So then the state becomes the forty-sixth state in 1907, and Manhattan then is the first corporate entity in the state of Oklahoma.

FR: That's right. We have a copy of the certificate around here somewhere. We have the original in a safe deposit box.

JE: I don't know what the first building built by Manhattan Construction was, if it goes before that, but they were the low-bidder in the original Oklahoma state capitol building in Guthrie.

FR: Um-hmm (affirmative). We built the second one as well. And now we're going to renovate.

JE: So there's an interesting story, some of you listening to this, what you built a capital building in Guthrie. And we know the story there that actually there was a vote taken amongst the populace of Oklahoma and they voted 96,000 votes to move the capital to Oklahoma City. Guthrie came in second with 31,000, and Shawnee with 8,000.

So then, Governor Haskell says, "All right, this is the way it shall be." However, they say that in the dark of night they actually came and stole the state seal from Guthrie and took it to Oklahoma City, and so now your company builds the second.

FR: And I've heard that, from some of Bob's research, that it was kind of a partisan deal. That there was a bit of a Republican-Democrat issue in whether it would be Guthrie or Oklahoma City. I don't know if that's accurate or not.

JE: Well, it was wrested away from Guthrie—

FR: You bet.

JE: ...and probably folks there are still upset about that. You built the Oklahoma state capital building, and, we should say also, they didn't finish the dome then. But you finished the dome later on—

FR: We did.

JE: ...under the administration of Governor Frank Keating.

FR: And a joint venture with Flintco, which was a great state project. Frank courageously fought to get that done and I think his judgment's been vindicated many times over. Oklahomans are proud to have that dome on there.

JE: Manhattan constructs the Love County courthouse. They did thirty county courthouse projects across Oklahoma?

FR: Yeah about half the ones in the state we built.

JE: Then they finished the construction on the relocation capital in Oklahoma City, 1917. Then you build in Texas, your first Texas project there, the Dennison Hotel.

FR: Yeah they did. They did a few projects in North Texas and a few courthouses and things before they actually, later in the '50s, got started full time in Houston.

JE: Did they not have any competition at all?

FR: Oh sure.

JE: Because they landed major, major projects in our state.

FR: They did.

JE: Can you talk about that?

FR: There's always plenty of competition in most any business and especially construction. I think that Granddad must have been a really good operator. His partner, Houston Deke Bolland, was a very good operator and I think Granddad had some good people and a good organization. But there were many companies around, you know. I used to have the W. R. Grimshaw Company in Tulsa, you had Flintco, Tulsa Rig and Reel, it was called then. They started out more on the oilfield side and moved in a building. The Bass Family from Enid is an old construction company. Mr. Bass Sr. was a real good friend of my grandparents. So there's plenty of competition around.

And in Dallas, of course, the Henry C. Beck Company was the old one we used to compete with for years.

JE: But you're always landing them.

FR: Well, not always. We got our share, put it that way.

JE: You've had your losses too, I mean—

FR: Oh yeah, when—

JE: ...lost out.

FR: ...we get a bad job, it's a bad job. We've had some real bad jobs.

JE: Manhattan builds its first project for American Airlines in 1943; '55, Lawrence F. Rooney, called one of the most colorful industrial leaders in Oklahoma.

FR: I believe he might have been colorful, yeah. All these old-time oil guys, construction guys, lived hard, rode hard, and were put up wet. You know?

JE: Do you see yourself in them at all? Are you a different kind of person?

FR: No. I think I'm more process-centric person.

JE: Lawrence F. Rooney retires in '56, remains company's board of directors. And then you have, I guess, those who were not members of the family, Ray Bassor?

FR: Ba-sore, yeah, for a few years.

JE: Ray Bassor retires?

FR: Till my dad, yeah.

JE: That's when your dad then takes over—

FR: Exactly.

JE: ...in 1960. And what do you remember about that? I mean, there's some icons in Texas, Fiesta Texas Theme Park, Texas Rangers Ball Park, Cowboy Stadium.

FR: Yeah, we've been very fortunate to have had good clients and good people. If you have good people and do a good job you'll get good clients. And if you have good clients it gives you an opportunity to really build up a great company, and to feel real fortunate, both for the people who have put their career with Manhattan, and the customers that have put their trust in Manhattan.

JE: Now during these years, are you thinking, "I'm eventually going to come back to the company"?

FR: Not really.

JE: And the construction company? No?

FR: No, I loved working construction, but I was pretty interested in both practicing law for a while in Houston, and really pretty interested in staying in Houston. I really like Houston and Texas. Obviously we did come back, on a moment's notice, when Dad got cancer, but Kathleen and I expected to stay in Houston.

Chapter 07—1:23

Father Rooney

John Erling: Did your father talk to about he'd sure like you to become part of the company? Was there any of that kind of discussion going on? He never did any of that?

Francis Rooney: It never came up.

JE: So they—

FR: We talked about the company at times.

JE: But never bringing you in or asking you if you will, or, "I'm going to retire," and all this kind of thing?

FR: No. That might have evolved had he lived longer, I mean, he died when he was fifty-five.

JE: Was that sudden?

FR: Well, they said it was going to be. They gave him five weeks when they found it, but he ended up living from February to October.

JE: He was one of these robust sort of guys?

FR: He was. He was a great hunter, loved to quail hunt. When I'd come home from high school, having been playing football, wrestling, and stuff like that, and running cross-country and whatnot, he'd make a point of taking me quail hunting and walk me to death. Just to make sure that I knew who was boss. I mean, he could walk eight, nine hours straight, only taking time for a sandwich.

This was back around the time when all down around Muskogee and Stigler County and all that, we had a lot of quail.

JE: How was he built? Was he your size? Bigger?

FR: No he was about my size.

JE: But he could walk?

FR: He could walk. He could walk. He loved to hunt. Yeah, he was a good shot too. Many times I saw him kill two quail with one shot.

JE: Wow.

FR: I could barely hit one with tons of shots.

JE: But you kept up with him?

FR: Oh yeah, no, I loved it. It was a great thing to do with my dad, yeah. We hunted a lot. Ducks, geese, quail.

JE: And the dogs that are involved in those kind of things?

FR: Dogs are fun, yeah. He had all this cadre of duck dogs and quail-hunting dogs, the whole bit, um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Great bonding experience, wasn't it?

FR: Oh yeah. You're out there all day.

Chapter 08—8:30

Nearly Went Broke

John Erling: So then when he dies, obviously, what are we going to do next for the company?

Francis Rooney: Yeah, that was a very difficult time. It was 1980, the boon was still on, as you may recall around here. And it stopped abruptly in 1982. I mean, they always say that the milestone is Penn Square Bank, right around the 4th of July, 1982. And it was bad, it was bad. All of our customers were broke, the company was rolling along. It's hard to slow something down that's rolling along that hard. The subcontractors were all going broke. We had a very difficult time.

The guys who were running the company made some bad decisions too. It was so bad, like in 1985, or so, the only two significant projects in the city of Tulsa were those two shopping centers at 61st and Memorial. Fortunately, we had them both. Eaton Square, and then the one on the Southside. They don't like anything particular right now but in 1985 there wasn't anything else going on but them.

JE: Those were the only projects?

FR: Those were the only significant projects going on in town it was so slow.

JE: Yeah.

FR: And so what happened for the companies that were in Oklahoma and Texas that were affected by the oil bust, you had to make a decision as to whether you go find some other places to work or you shrink. And a lot of people, including the blockheads running this company, decided they were going to find some new places to work instead of shrink.

A lot of companies did that, many of them went broke. We came pretty close. We got down to where we had less than \$800,000 working capital. They took a disastrous job up in Wichita—we'd never worked up in Wichita. It was cold up there. You've got to do things to work through the winter up there that you don't have to do down here. They didn't know that. They took a job in Washington, DC, on one of the most horrific sites around Tyson's Corner, the ones that the locals all put more money in the bid for because they knew the site had terrible drainage and access problems.

Of course, our guys, right off the turnip truck, "Yeah, we can go do that."

Well, we lost a few million dollars there too. And so the long and short of it, we got down to less than \$800,000 in working capital, Timothy and I were just buying the company. I mean, I guess it worked well in the sense that we got it for a very good price, in hindsight, but at the time there wasn't much of a company to buy. So I immediately laid off half the company.

JE: You bought that because it was an emotional buy, a family buy? You wouldn't have bought it otherwise?

FR: No I thought that we had a great name, it takes years to build that up, we had some really good people, we just didn't have any money. The same good people that were making a lot of money in '78 through '82, were losing a lot of money in '82 through '84, but it wasn't any of their fault. It was the management that was too aggressive and was going in and taking risks in areas that they didn't understand what they were doing.

So I didn't think it would be that big a deal to shrink the company up and regroup them in my cadre of younger guys. Back then we were all in our early thirties, me and the guys that stayed. Laid off half the company and we decided we were going to ride it out. We were going to ride it out where we worked, Oklahoma and Texas.

And we did stay in DC, and kept doing one or two projects at a time, having paid a few million dollars for the entry ticket in losses.

JE: It was an interesting time here because you had Cal Burns, who assumed the presidency. He passes away in 1982, and was then succeeded by Don Jones, who died in 1984.

FR: Yeah.

JE: So leadership literally dies off. This is coming down to '84, a very pivotal year, that's then where you became the CEO.

FR: Yeah I became CEO when we bought it. Don was still president but he died a couple of years later. It might have been '83 when I became president, when we were in the process of buying it. We didn't get it closed until '84.

We have these pictures of the ancestors on the walls of some of the different offices like down here. Someone asked me one time, "Why don't you put a picture up there?"

I said, "You've got to be dead to get your picture up there."

JE: And so you did assume the presidency then of Manhattan at a very critical time?

FR: Yeah it was critical, we had less than \$800,000 of working capital, laid off half the company, laid off the older and expensive guys and kept the young guys and we just regrouped and decided we were going to ride it out.

JE: And then you expanded your operations in Oklahoma City, didn't you, at that—

FR: We did. We did. We were fortunate to get some work from Baptist Hospital that gave us a chance to go to Oklahoma City. And reopen the office there. We were also fortunate to get some work in Dallas a couple of years later.

The first job we did when we went back into Dallas, you know, we'd been in there early in the '70s building a large part of DFW Airport in the Dallas Convention Center. And got a chance to go back to Dallas for Gerald D. Hines, building a job that actually was a Chili's, Norman Brinker's headquarters.

And, of course, we had the office in Houston. Our first big break came when Williams Companies here built River Center Mall in San Antonio. They gave us our first big break, Williams Realty. We also built the two black buildings down where Samson Resources is for them.

JE: In downtown Tulsa?

FR: Right. Those were the jobs that let us get back on the map, both with customers, and then the industry, and financially as well.

JE: And then you were on your way. In 1993, you were given the National Excellence in Construction award and there was a point, I'm sure, you know, "That will never happen to us."

FR: No I never would have thought any of this would have happened. We just wanted to keep from going broke.

JE: When you assumed the presidency, of course, you knew the company already—

FR: Oh yeah I knew the people, I knew the business, and I'd done pretty much every job you could do.

JE: So it wasn't like you were a new person walking in.

FR: Right.

JE: And then you began to, as you said, cut employees and all. When things turn around, the economic conditions of the country also helped you at that time?

FR: Well, you know, Oklahoma and Texas worked through the oil bust. Like everything seems to get worked through by some time or another, things started to gradually get a little better. St. Francis started to expand a little bit, St. Johns, we got back into St. Johns. Baptist was expanding, the airport started having little things coming. So gradually the economy got better.

JE: Yeah.

FR: In Oklahoma, and certainly in Houston it did. It bounced back real fast in Texas, Dallas and Houston.

JE: Everybody sees this name, Manhattan Construction, and they don't know, unless they listen to this, there was a time you only had \$800,000 in working capital, wondering, "Are we going to survive?"

FR: That's right.

JE: Do you ever take any of these things to sleep at night? Do they keep you awake at night?

FR: No.

JE: You shut them off?

FR: I never had any problem with that, any problem with stress or anything like that. We just had to do what we had to do, and hopefully, again, if you have good people and you're in a good place, Oklahoma is a great place to be because people are honest and work hard and always willing to give you a chance. And you can make things work out if you don't just outrun your skis and take too much risk.

Construction management sometimes become enamored with growth. What we always used to say around here was, "You can't eat volume, you can only eat profits." And sometimes when people don't own the company it's a lot easier for them to want to build a monument and have a big billion-dollar sales or something. When you own the company it's like, "We'd better just make a little profit here."

JE: Other executives here, do you have to remind other people of that?

FR: Sometimes.

JE: Maybe sometimes?

FR: Sometimes. We'd had a few other bad patches where we've had a few bad jobs. We actually had some bad jobs while I was in Rome. They kind of got a little out of parameter and we had to change some people out.

It's real interesting, okay? Because I came in in '84 with Don and the young guys and we regrouped and built a new management team. Then I found that when we came back from Rome around 2010, '11, digging into what had been going on, that many of the management team that had been in their thirties was now in their sixties and some of them hadn't made so well. Some of them, it had become more about them than the company. And it was time to make a few changes again, which we did. And we're about right now at the end of regrouping and rebuilding the second management team for the company to take it to the next level.

And we've got our son here, we've got the other two kids in the business in DC, got a new president of the building business, John Reyhan, who actually lives in Atlanta. He came from a competitor. We replaced a few managers. We've had some people be promoted from within, which is great. So we have a whole new management team.

JE: Then are they in their forties, fifties?

FR: Some of them are in their fifties. Some of them are in their forties. And there's a few in their thirties.

JE: After employees get to work so long they begin to take ownership and there's an ego or there's something here that—

FR: Well, you've probably seen it too, John. People age differently, physically and mentally.

JE: Right.

FR: You know? I mean, you look at my idol, Walt Helmerick. The guy was so sharp and careful physically about what he ate, didn't drink, he read all the time, was so focused on current events, he was not going to let history run him down. He's kind of a model of people aging well. But not all people do.

So we had some people here who really were thinking about retiring. Maybe they couldn't verbalize it, but I think they were not maybe looking to the future and as open to new ideas. You know, markets are always changing. Customers' interests or priorities are always changing, and so it's time for just a little bit of a spiritual tune-up around here.

Chapter 09—3:40

Oklahoma City Jail

John Erling: Some major construction jobs in 2000, Reliant Stadium, four hundred million dollar project in Houston, constructing the first ever retractable roof—

Francis Rooney: Yeah.

JE: ...in the NFL.

FR: Yeah.

JE: And what a challenge that had to be.

FR: That was very interesting, yeah. Very interesting.

JE: Three-acre size, made it the largest in the United States.

FR: Yeah, until Jerry Jones. His is one-third bigger, a full one-third bigger. It's a big one.

JE: So when they're tackling that kind of project, your architects, your engineers, and so forth, they're on it and you're right in there with them?

FR: Sure.

JE: Are you talking to them about it?

FR: All the time, yeah.

JE: And understand—

FR: A construction project is the ultimate team sport. It takes a lot of people to build a project. It takes designers, engineers, consultants about water and mechanical and air-conditioning and electrical. It takes interior designers. It takes construction people to estimate what it's going to cost, to figure out the optimum scheduling to make the parts go together as efficiently as possible, the best combination of time and money and quality.

And then it takes the workers, both at Manhattan and the subcontractors, to execute the work. And they have to be trained, organized, compensated, etcetera.

JE: So as a president would have his cabinet meeting you go right down the line. Obviously these are people you can trust. You can't be expected to know everything they know about that, that's their profession, but you can talk to them and trust in, "Okay, you said it, I count on it."

FR: You got to have a lot of good people to do big construction. When you don't, and someone takes an out of parameter risk or an un-thought-out risk, everybody in the company suffers. Because usually, at least our experience is, when we have a bad job, it's a bad job. It's a few million-dollar loss, it's just not an ankle-biter.

But we always complete the work and take care of the customer. Regardless of what we may have screwed up in getting there.

JE: Maybe some construction companies don't complete or they're into it so deep they can't? Or—

FR: Or they'll fight for extra money and blame other people and those kinds of things.

JE: So you say, "No, this is what we agreed to," and the customer is going to get that.

FR: Yeah.

JE: And so the name of Manhattan has always been strong, ever since its first beginning it never went through any controversy. So even though it was in tough times Manhattan still stood strong, that name.

FR: Right. We've only had one project that involved controversy, and that was the Oklahoma County Jail in the early '90s, I believe, early '90s. And what happened there was Oklahoma, like all states, had kind of a crony program of licensing architects and awarding public work to architects and things.

You know, you had the David Hall scandals that David Boren uncovered. Well, Oklahoma County was not immune to that. And they had a guy that was actually a crooked county commissioner named Barnes, who actually, I believe, went to jail.

We bid the job and got it. The architects that were designing it had never done a jail. They'd gotten the project because of crony capitalism, so to speak. So the job was

defective in many respects. I had to know that because I had to lead the company's response to this. It was a real serious problem. It didn't have nearly as strong of inbeds as it should have had to hold the tension fixers on. It didn't have nearly as strong of the things that go back in the wall to hold a window in, it's just a defective job that needed a lot of remediation.

Of course, all fingers were pointed all different ways in those circumstances. And my job was to defend the company, which I did.

JE: Hmm.

FR: Ultimately, we were proved absolutely right about everything. The architects were a real problem. County officials were a bit of a problem. And it was unfortunate.

JE: Yeah, but, it didn't really sully the name of Manhattan?

FR: No, because we were vindicated on all fronts.

JE: Right.

FR: All we did was build the building. We actually tried to point some stuff out that we saw that was a problem, and no one wanted to deal with it.

Chapter 10—3:55

Ambassador Rooney

John Erling: So we're coming along to 2005, which is a pivotal year for you, maybe for the company. Because this is the time that President George W. Bush, in his second administration, would tab you to be the US Ambassador to the Holy See.

Francis Rooney: He did, February 2005.

JE: What was the first hint that that was coming about?

FR: Well, I'd known the president, I'd gotten to know him when he was the managing partner of the baseball team, and we built the stadium for him and spent a lot of time with him. And a really great person.

And, by the way, I would say he's the same level-headed, decent person right now and when he was in office as he was when he was walking around that ballpark at Arlington Sight in 1991, or '92. He's a very well-grounded person. As is his brother Jeb.

So when he ran for governor we were involved in his campaign, helping him out. And certainly when he ran for president. And the first term I was asked to do a few things that I do for him, attend some things that donors get to do. He sent me on a couple of presidential commissions, one to Panama with Colin Powell when Omar Torrijos was inaugurated.

So, I had a feeling they would ask me—they had talked about some other things that just weren't quite ready. Our kids were still at Cascia Hall and it just wasn't the time to leave the country.

But the next time around, after the 2004 election, our daughter was fixin' to head to Notre Dame. The boys were already at Notre Dame. It was a good time.

So I was really surprised when the president asked me to do this, because it's a very important post to him. Certainly a prestigious one, all the European ones are. And I figured, since I spoke Spanish, I'd probably get sent to the Dominican Republic or somewhere, you know?

But it was a great experience to be able to serve him, his administration, and the country.

JE: Was there a point when he asked you directly?

FR: Yeah. In his office.

JE: Okay.

FR: Yeah.

JE: You went to the West Wing of the White House.

FR: I got a call right after the inauguration, I mean, like the next week. We'd hardly even flown back. That they would like me, within the next ten days if I could, come back to Washington and talk to them about some things. So I went in. It's all in my book.

Deana Powell, who was the director of White House personnel mentioned this position and then I went in and talked to the president for a while. That was it. Immediately. "Down to the State Department to get your papers."

JE: So you said yes on the spot.

FR: Of course.

JE: Because you'd discussed this with Kathleen.

FR: Oh yeah.

JE: And then the kids?

FR: We had a pretty good idea it'd be something. And she was okay with it.

JE: At the time, I believe, Pope John Paul was eighty-four and in poor health.

FR: Yeah, we went over after he had died and when Pope Benedict was pope.

JE: Your preparation then for this position, kind of talk about that.

FR: Yeah, the State Department does a very good job of preparing ambassadors to go to post. There were some things in the news last year about a couple of President Obama's choices that were embarrassed for not knowing enough about their country and hearings and things. Believe me, that's not the State Department's fault, that's theirs. If you do what the State Department says you will have enough consultations, read enough materials, you will be drawn into enough policy discussion to be able to be an effective representative of the country. You just have to put the time into it.

JE: You had ambassador seminars?

FR: Um-hmm (affirmative). First we had a lot of consultations in the State Department. We were in meeting people that were in positions or had been in positions that dealt with issues pertinent to the Holy See mission. Lots, I mean, like thirty or forty consultations around the department. Maybe more than that. And some other non-State Department entities, think tanks, things like that that had information to adduce that would help me be well-rounded. Even had a two-day seminar about Oriental and Orthodox religions, just so I could get the nomenclature down. Kathleen and I both did. You can't imagine how many different sects there are of Christianity. There's about five pages worth.

JE: Hmm.

FR: Then the final thing is the ambassador's seminar, which is a two-week seminar that all ambassadors go to, whether you're a career-department person or a political person. No matter how many times you've been an ambassador before you're going to go to that seminar.

The first week of it they talk about the rules. How not to run afoul of the State Department's rules, as far as financial reimbursement, what the government will pay for versus what you pay for, things like that.

And the second week is more policy-centric. Meeting with the press and learning those kinds of things, they coach you.

Chapter 11—3:25

Holy See and Vatican

John Erling: Let's just explain here the difference between Holy See and Vatican.

Francis Rooney: The Holy See comes from the Roman word for "seat." And it means the locus of authority, the centralization around the pope and the curia, the organization of the church, the centralization of their influence and their ability to extend influence around the world.

Vatican, itself, is 188-acre piece of land, which was given to the Holy See by the Lateran Treaty in 1929, which culminated settlement between the Holy See and Italy over the taking of the papal lands in 1870, when Garibaldi unified Italy.

So the sovereignty stems from the influence of the Holy See in the world. In fact, people that want to undermine or demune the Holy See's role in the world will say that the sovereignty comes from the Vatican City State, therefore, it's like Liechtenstein, who really cares about them. But in truth and in fact, the sovereignty stemming from a global organization with global reach is something that's valuable and useful both to the United States and to other countries.

JE: You have to be a Catholic to be an ambassador?

FR: No, uh-uh (negative). It helps, but, you know, 30 Holy See missions are from Arab states and only 123 out of 180 are Catholic countries. But it's nice because all the ceremonial activities are Catholic-related, and contain a lot of priests and things like that.

JE: You're sworn in, are you thinking to yourself, "I'm this kid from Muskogee, and here I am?"

FR: Especially when I went in to meet the pope.

JE: Right. I want to get to that. But you were sworn in and then taken to the Oval Office. And President Bush was there. So this was pretty heady stuff.

FR: Yeah, I'd been in the Oval Office before, but that was a nice surprise. The way swearing-ins go, you can have anybody you want swear you in. A lot of people get Secretary of State. The risk of booking Secretary of State is something could happen and he or she could have to fly off to Burundi or somewhere and then you're stuck with some low-level functionary. So I didn't try to get Condoleezza Rice.

So I said I'd just go to the White House and get Andy Card, 'cause I knew he'd be there. Chief of Staff is always there, he never leaves. So that's what I did.

I got all done and I wanted to have a little visit with my friend Carl Rove. He said, "Hey, guess what? We've got a few minutes on the schedule free. Someone wants to say hi to you."

So I went in and spent a half hour visit with President Bush. It was great.

JE: Do you recall any of that conversation?

FR: Oh we talked about Rome and the visitors. You know, we don't ever really go to Italy, we always go to Latin American countries. He said, "You won't believe the visitors you're going to get."

I didn't recall it at the time but one of his daughters had actually done a junior year abroad or something, so he was quite familiar with Italy. And he was right. We got more visitors than you can imagine. We were bombarded by visitors. It was great, by the way, but a lot of that.

We talked about the work and some of his priorities—

JE: Okay, so then you received your official instructions then from him?

FR: Well, the way that works, you receive official instructions in writing from the Secretary of State and in a letter from him. It's all very formal.

This was more informal, like his priorities and different things, as only the president would do. The way it works is you get a letter from the president that says, "You are the president's personal representative in X country. You report directly to the president. And you're supposed to do these different kinds of things to effectuate American policy there, broaden understanding of American values," etcetera, etcetera.

And then you get a separate letter from the Secretary of State, which basically said, "Yes, you're the president's personal representative and that's all well and good. But you also work for me and the State Department."

And in truth and in fact, that's what you do. I mean, you don't bother the White House all the time. You go through the Desk Officers for your area, work up through the en-arm case, it was the European Bureau, EUR, and there was a desk officer that looked after Italy and the Holy See.

Chapter 12—1:27

Issues of the President

John Erling: What were some of the issues that the president wanted you to address?

Francis Rooney: Well, he was very interested in the role that the Vatican could play in the embryonic stem cell issue, which we definitely made sure the Vatican was deeply supportive of the president's work there.

He was very interested, of course, on the global war on terror. This was before Benedict had carved himself out as a virulent, criticizer of radical Islamicis. That was something that I had a little bit of a real help in try to get going, you know, to get them to step up. And who would have known that Benedict would step up as strongly as he did. And some of his speeches were very, very clear and helpful.

He was very interested in PEPFAR, you know, since Caritas is the huge caregiver in Africa and 27 percent of AIDS patients are dealt with in a Catholic healthcare institution. There's obvious synergy to level Caritas's ability to distribute retroviral drugs and things like that in Africa, which is what PEPFAR was there to do. So that's something that I worked on quite a bit.

And then, something that we didn't talk about that we did work on and that I did talk to him about later was the trafficking in persons. Which our mission is very big in supporting these nuns around the world that try to get the girls and rehabilitate them and try to expose traffickers and things like. The president became a real advocate of that program and helped us out a lot. When I left, the program's about three times bigger than when I got there.

Kathleen actually did a great breakfast when we were over there for Sister Eugenia, who is one of the world leaders in anti-trafficking. In fact, we had the OU CIS students go meet her when they were over there a couple of years ago. Kathleen had a breakfast for her and Mrs. Bush so they could meet up.

Chapter 13—2:06
On the Way to Rome

John Erling: So you're on your way to Rome, and on an emotional side, how exciting this has got to be for your family.

Francis Rooney: It was exciting. We made it a family event and the kids came back and forth all the time. But on the way over what was interesting is what they tell you is, "You're going to get off the plane and you're going to have to go in and make a speech. Right then and there." So I had to throw a tie on and what not.

JE: Who was there to hear this?

FR: It was to about 150 journalists, people interested in meeting the new ambassador, people interested in US Holy See relations. They call it the *ceremoniale*. There's kind of a receiving room in the airport for these kind of dignitary things. I think a lot of airports probably have them. You would never know unless you were involved in that kind of thing.

So they take you in, I'd been flying all night on American Airlines, so they let you get cleaned up a little bit. And made my talk and there it goes.

JE: You told them why you were there and what you were representing?

FR: Yeah, I had written, the State Department had helped me, we'd written something up about what we wanted to accomplish and what the president wanted to accomplish with the Holy See. It started out just like gangbusters, you know. It started with that and then went to the house, dropped the bags down, went to give another talk and a lunch. Just didn't stop for a while.

JE: But then your first visit with Pope Benedict. Tell us about that experience.

FR: Well, that was a really great experience. The Vatican picks you up, you have to wear a, they call it a "frack" over there, but what it is is a white tie deal, tails. But instead of a white vest, like what we would wear at a debutante deal here, you wore a black one. So I had to get one of them.

The Vatican picked us up in cars. Kathleen and I had a car and the kids had a different car. And some of the State Department folks that were coming had a different car. A big motorcade. You know, it's just like the president. They shut down the street and you go right down Conciliazione, the main street there, right into the gate on the left side, I forget the name of the exact gate, it's in my notes. I think it's in the book too. You go right in and tourists are all behind those velvet ropes. You go in, see the pope.

JE: You didn't know that would happen to you. You're driving down there like the president of the United States or something to—

FR: Yeah it was really different, yeah. I was very surprised by that.

JE: Yeah.

FR: I've been with presidents before when they're doing it but I'd never—

JE: Didn't think you would.

FR: ...been doing it.

JE: Right.

FR: Of course, people are taking all these pictures when we're walking through St. Peter's and the kids were joking. They said, "They think that's some dignitary, Dad. They don't it's just you."

Chapter 14—4:40

First Visit with the Pope

John Erling: Talk to us about that first visit. You walk into what room and how does that work?

Francis Rooney: Yeah, the way it works in the Vatican is it's a labyrinth. You go through one room, you go through another big room where there's a big white marble chair that's where the popes used to actually sit when they received dignitaries.

I joked with the president as we walking through there. I said, "You know, up until about thirty years ago the pope would have been sitting on that when he was talking with you." But anyway, not anymore.

And you go around the corner through a couple more rooms and you get to the end and you're just outside the papal library. Which is the one they always use. It's got the big books on the ends of the bookcases. That's the papal library. Just outside of it there's an El Greco painting, there's a lot of that kind of stuff there. So we get down to that. They open the door, we go in, we do photos with the pope. Actually, we do the photos in an anteroom called the Ambassador's Receiving Room. We do all the pictures.

My mother and aunt from Florida were there. Aunt Eileen was going to come, Aunt Eileen Hughley, but her doctor wouldn't let her travel. She was in failing health at the time. In fact, that's a different story about that, I think I put it in the book about asking my aunts to come.

But anyway, they took all the pictures. Then Kathleen, the kids, Mom, all left. They shut this huge door and it was just me and the pope, sitting around a table just like this. In his library. And I thought, "This is really something." I was nervous. I couldn't even really talk, at first, and so he started talking. So then I finally got my deal going, 'cause I had some things I was supposed to say.

JE: So he put you at ease?

FR: He did.

JE: He could read immediately that you were—

FR: Yeah. In fact, I said, “I imagine this happens all the time, doesn’t it?”

He said, “Yeah, it does happen a lot.” He has kind of a sense of humor, you know?

JE: What is it about that moment? You’re never at a loss for words but you were then. What brings that on?

FR: Oh, you’re sitting there in the apostolic palace, it’s build started in the twelfth century and finished in the fourteenth or fifteenth. You’ve gone through all these cotton-pickin’ rooms, which I think there’s a strategy. It’s kind of like a warm-up bout. You get in there, they shut the door, and you’re in the pope’s library. Every pope has been sitting there for six hundred years, and you’re sitting there with the pope. Well, I had hardly even known any bishops before we got this job. The two that buried Dad, Bishop Ganter and Beltran, here, and I knew Bishop Slattery here, and those were about the only bishops I’d ever met.

JE: To make small talk with the pope—

FR: So it was pretty nerve-wracking.

JE: ...it’s hard to say, “Hi, how are you?” like we say here. Huh?

FR: Exactly, you know? So I couldn’t talk at all. So he started speaking and then I started speaking. I said a couple of things that were really important to the president, the First Amendment.

And he said, “The First Amendment has been a great experiment. It has worked out very well for the United States.” We talked a little bit how it might be good for Europe to have had that at different times, separation of church and state. And I knew, from having a brief, that he was really clued in on the First Amendment, had actually made some talks about it at Notre Dame, in fact. So he knew the United States.

We talked about the Iraq situation and how we were hoping that we could put the disagreements of the Holy See behind us. And he was all for that. He said, “I’m basically starting a new regime here. I’m not going to carry over any old disagreements about Iraq. We want to work together to hopefully make the best of a tough situation for the people there and the Christians.” And just talked about a whole laundry list of things that were important to the White House and the State Department.

JE: Does the church oppose the US involvement in Iraq?

FR: Very much so.

JE: You came prepared to defend that, no doubt, and he just kind of waved that off, and that was not going to be an argument?

FR: Right. He said, “I think enough’s been said about Iraq.” And he was right, enough had been said, enough negative.

Part of my job was to keep criticism of Iraq as muted as possible over there. And there were a few stone-throwers in the curia that were always shooting off about Iraq this and Iraq that. And by and large, they stayed pretty quiet for almost the whole time we were there.

There was one time the pope spoke up after a particularly heinous level of violence around Easter. He spoke up at his Easter morning Urbi et Orbi Message about Iraq. But that was really the only time the pope ever got into it.

So I felt pretty good about doing my job, anyway.

JE: And your book, *The Global Vatican*, I suggest everybody should read, by the way.

FR: Oh thank you.

JE: The pope wanted to bring stability to the region and Islam fundamentalists. And he said there were two Mohammeds.

FR: We were talking about the Koran. And the problem of using the Koran for justifying violence. And some of the harsh language in the Koran. He said, "Well, the problem is which Mohammed shows up?" The Mohammed in the early cirrus is very evangelistic, religious-oriented, nurturing, prayerful, merciful—I know that sounds strange to believe with Islam, and it is. But then the later cirrus as Mohammed became more aggressive or more conqueritorial, more territorial, and more violent words.

You know, there's a lot of things in the Bible that read without the context of two thousand years of interpretation can be fairly harsh sounding as well. So that seems to be one of the challenges for Islam is to have them interpret their Koran in a way that's consistent with the modern world.

That's kind of what the pope was getting at. So the Koran has got something in there for everybody, we just got to get the right people using the right part.

Chapter 15—4:00

Ambassador's Staff

John Erling: Tell us about your office location, staff, and that kind of thing.

Francis Rooney: The office is in a house that the government rents on the Circus Maximus, Aventine Hill. If this was my office that would be the Circus Maximus right there. Which really worked out great with journalists. Because I would sit with my back to the wall and it had a big couch, and put the journalists over there. So any time I'd get stumped for something I'd say, "Boy, isn't it amazing to be here with the Circus Maximus?" Which happens fairly regularly with journalists, quite frankly.

So it's a nice little house, it's not a big mission, you see, because we don't have consular activity, business promotion, etc. We had a couple of political officers, protocol officer, some writers to turn out the daily grind of press releases and statements and different things, and then me and my DCM, that's the State Department person called the Deputy Chief of Mission. He's kind of the chief of staff of the ambassador, kind of keeps the wheels on. And is a career—always a career official. Many of them end their careers by being ambassadors as well.

JE: So you ask a lot of questions of him, I suppose? He gave you lots of counsel and guidance, did he?

FR: Yeah. And there's a lot of things that they do that the ambassadors don't want to fool with. So you can be off making speeches or attending public events and they keep the wheels on. Make first draft of different policy statements and things. But everything that goes out of an embassy goes out in the ambassador's name. So you really have to pay attention to what they write and edit it and make sure it's right.

When the WikiLeaks happened there was a cable about polling that I'd written about the Holy See wanting to use the polls to strengthen religion and Eastern Europe. Logical enough. When the WikiLeaks thing came out some columnist, a Vatican columnist, made a comment that that had to have been written by the State Department folks because no ambassador would know enough about polling to write that.

I called him up, I said, "That is totally incorrect." I actually used stronger language than that. I said, "I wrote every word of that thing." But anyhow.

JE: That's quite impressive. Your staff, though, you couldn't hire or fire, I mean, whatever the—

FR: No, and it was very interesting for me having run a business all my life to have a team there that I didn't hire, couldn't fire, and could really do very little to incentivize or manage. 'Cause they're civil servants for the State Department.

JE: How did that work? Did you feel you needed to or you should have been able to?

FR: Well, I learned a lot there of trying to figure out how to motivate people without the traditional tools. For example, one thing they tell you about in ambassador school is a lot of the dos and don'ts that you can't use government money for. Or government people for doing personal things.

For example, making a personal restaurant reservation for Kathleen and the kids to go eat when the kids were over there. That's not official business. So technically, the OMS, which is what the secretaries are called over, the Office Management Specialists, not supposed to do that. Nor is she supposed to mail a personal letter for you.

So I said, "Okay." I would email Sharon here and say, "Sharon, could you please make a reservation at Giovanni's?" over here around the corner from our house in Rome. She would make the reservation or airplane tickets or whatever.

So finally, Tammy, the OMS, came in and said to me, “Well, you know, I can make these reservations for you and do all this stuff.”

And I said, “Huh? Technically you’re not supposed to.”

She said, “Well, I can if I want.”

I said, “Okay. I just didn’t want to get afoul of any rules.” And they put those rules in there so that if the ambassador’s a jerk the people don’t get abused.

JE: Hm.

FR: And it’s smart.

JE: Hm.

FR: I can understand it now and I agree with that because not all ambassadors care whether Tammy feels good or not. But coming from a company of people I want to make sure that everybody wanted to do a good job and felt good and wanted their feedback and that kind of stuff.

JE: And that staff must have noticed that difference perhaps, read that in you, and that must have been their incentive to work.

FR: Well, I was probably a little more casual than my predecessor. He’s a former military guy.

JE: Who was your predecessor?

FR: Jim Nicholson, great guy, great Republican, great Republican leader, great family person, great Catholic, great ambassador. But each person’s style is different.

JE: Um-hmm (agreement).

FR: I was more casual. Theoretically everybody stands up when the ambassador comes in the room. Well, they did that one day. First staff meeting that afternoon when we got there. I said, “You don’t have to do that. That’s ridiculous.”

A lot of times I’d purposefully miss the staff meetings and say, “Chris, you guys figure this out.”

JE: They address you as Mr. Ambassador all the time?

FR: Oh yeah, always do that. Always do that. But this standing up is kind of ridiculous. And having to wear a coat in the meeting.

Chapter 16—7:15

Power of the Pope

John Erling: Not necessarily amongst your staff but in the Vatican, were there those who resented you as an ambassador of the United States because you were from the United States? Did you get any of that?

Francis Rooney: Oh occasionally, in fact, there's a deal in almost every mission where the longest tenured ambassador is called the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps for that country. So our Dean of the Diplomatic Corps was an old, half communist socialist from San Marino. Every year in the first week of January when we have our annual ambassador's Diplomatic Corps meeting with the pope and his blessing and all that, the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps gets up and makes statements that are supposed to reflect what the Diplomatic Corps feels and thinks.

So I went over to see this guy the first week I was there. And I said, "Look, you're not going to mention Iraq, and you're not going to mention global warming."

He said, "Well, yeah, I think I need to mention those things."

I said, "If you do, right there in St. Peter's, I'm going to call a press conference and I'm going to attack you with everything I've got. You're not going to mention global warming, and you're not going to mention Iraq." I said, "I come from a business, okay? There isn't any of this pussy-footing around stuff here. I'm going to represent President George W. Bush."

He did not like me at all. But he didn't mention Iraq, nor did he mention global warning, that time.

JE: Was that probably the only time that you had to be so direct and stand up?

FR: Yeah, there were a few other things but that was one that I thought was important to get off on the right foot. I didn't think it up because the last time the guy had mentioned a bunch of anti-US stuff. So the State Department said, "Could you please do what you can to try to muffle him?" So I did what I could to muffle.

JE: Hm. Most mornings then you went to the Vatican?

FR: Yeah. The diplomatic work is conducted with the secretary of the state of the Holy See, which is organized much like ours. Different monsignors have responsibilities for different country issues. They have a secretary of state. And he has people under him, and so most of those meetings would be either with the secretary of state or his top people under him. And usually they bring in the various monsignors who have specific country knowledge, just like if you go to the State Department and you meet with Secretary Rice or you meet with Nick Burns, they might call in the people from the EUR bureau because they're the ones that really are digging deep into what's going on in those countries.

That work takes place in the mornings over there, so I'd say three or four times a week I'd have a meeting over there.

JE: A little bit about the power of the pope. Every chain of command leads to him?

FR: Yes. In fact, that's part of the problem and that's what Pope Francis is trying to address. They still have a vestige of monarchism, if you will, where each dicastery and pontifical council reports directly up to the pope.

You've seen Cardinal Wuerl and Cardinal Dolan make comments about this that we need more of an executive management, modern management structure, where there's teamwork and cross-pollination of ideas and things like that instead of these silos.

The silos are good for like intelligence because you don't want anybody else to know what you're doing and they don't want you to know what they're doing in case something goes bad or something. Contain the damage.

But in business or in an organization like this you need to have differences of opinions, team-building, and different skills brought to bear to make the best decisions in a very complex world. And that's what Pope Francis tried to accomplish now.

JE: Um-hmm (agreement).

FR: But when I was over there, there were people that there was one person that they reported to and that was the only person they were going to report to.

JE: What position is the highest ranking next to the pope?

FR: The secretary of state. The secretary of state there is kind of like a combination prime minister and American secretary of state. He really has that wide a span of authority. Under him you have the prime minister side organization, which they call the first section, which deals with things coming from the Holy See to the world.

And then you have what they called the second section, which is the State Department side, if you will, which deals with interrelations with the ambassadors and heads of state and all that.

JE: The difference in a pope's personality can affect the position. Pope John was so ongoing, such an extrovert. Pope Benedict, he was an academic. I guess they both were but he was intensely intellectual—

FR: Philosopher.

JE: ...and so his demeanor was a little withdrawn, I suppose. These differences can affect the office he holds?

FR: Oh yeah, for sure, in fact, that's a really good question. One thing that happened a bunch of times to me was, I get a call from some big Catholic in the United States. And he'd say, "I want to go have mass with the pope."

I'd say, "Well, the pope doesn't do mass with people."

He'd say, "Well, Pope John Paul used to. I used to come over there and watch him put on his vestments and he'd have about ten or fifteen businessmen. We'd have mass with the pope."

I said, "Well, this pope doesn't do that. This is a new pope." In fact, when the pope went to see the president in April of 2008, the White House said, "Okay, we want to have a state dinner for the pope."

And I said, "He ain't gonna come. I guarantee, he's not going to come. He will meet with

the president, and he will do the others things that day. And he will go to the Nuncio tour and have a beer and play the piano and have dinner and go to bed. That's what he will do."

They said, "Well, we want you to get him there."

"I can't get him there. You guys pay me to know what the pope's going to do. I'm telling you exactly what the pope's going to do." And that's exactly what he did.

So at the state dinner, President Sarvari up and says, "Okay, welcome to the state dinner for the pope without the pope." And they even had German food.

JE: You said play the piano. Did the pope play the piano?

FR: Yeah, Pope Benedict plays the piano.

JE: What kind of music? What did he play?

FR: Oh that I don't know.

JE: You never heard him play?

FR: No, but he's known for doing that.

JE: Benedict, we're talking about. John Paul had deep respect for President Reagan, didn't he?

FR: Oh yeah. Yeah. The stories are legend about the parallel but naturally aligned efforts that Reagan, Thatcher, and Pope John Paul had to help bring down communism, each doing their own thing.

JE: I believe George H. W. Bush was not as engaged with the Vatican?

FR: Well, he was, but I wouldn't say he was maybe as public as, obviously, the Pope John Paul II ray at communism was, but there were a lot of things they worked on together. Ambassador Tom Malotti, who was his ambassador to the Holy See, died just last year. And I put some things in the book about some of the things he did, like when we invaded Panama, took Noriega down and he went to the Nuncio Tour and things like that.

JE: Bill Clinton had some disagreements?

FR: Bill Clinton had some serious disagreements in a limited circumscribed relationship, particularly because of the Cairo Population Conference in '94, where Hilary Clinton led the day to try to get euthanasia and abortion in a plank or platform.

The Holy See made that a real priority, if you will, to stop it. And they worked very hard to bring forces to bear against the Clintons. And they succeeded, including getting a bunch of Moslem women led by Benazir Bhutto to stand up and oppose the National African League, or whatever they call it, effort to do that.

JE: Hm. Then George W. Bush, I believe he set a record for US presidents in visiting the pope.

FR: He did, he had six visits, I think it was. I don't think any of the other popes ever had more than one or two. He was very interested in what the Holy See had to say about different things, particularly about Iran, particularly about the global war on terror, the stem cell things I mentioned, and PEPFAR and what of it. Very engaged.

JE: He's talked about his own faith, spiritual connection that he has, although he's not a Catholic.

FR: No he's Episcopalian.

JE: Still, he is very taken with the pope from a spiritual standpoint, but then he also realizes in the world the position the pope can play.

FR: That's exactly right. He's a very religious person, so he values the role of religion in society and in people's lives. That's one thing.

The other thing, as such then, it's natural that he can see that the pope can be a leading instrument for good for a value-based government, a value-based diplomacy.

Chapter 17—4:20

Cuba

John Erling: Now our present president, Barak Obama, has not been as engaged, I believe, with the Vatican as was, certainly, George W. Bush. However, it's interesting they have connected now on Cuba.

Francis Rooney: Um-hmm (affirmative). That is interesting. You know, the first six years President Obama had very, very little interest in the Holy See. And, of course, the Holy See had very little interest in him because of some of the positions he'd taken. Mostly on the life issues and things like that.

Now, with the arrival of Pope Francis, beginning with the discourse about social justice and capitalism versus safety net and the poor and all that, there's been a little more symmetry with the views of this administration. I think the pope's been misunderstood a few times. And the press sometimes has a habit of taking what they want out of something and extracting that tidbit without getting the whole thing. We all do that in our own way, but that was what I think brought the president to have the visit last March with him.

In fact, I had the chance to do some briefing work on that with the secretary of state's office in November preceding that visit. They were interested in some of the things that Pope Francis was saying. And I think that visit went pretty well.

The president tried to manipulate the pope and they even realized a statement, before the meeting had been held, to the press, saying what the meeting had said. Which is a little ironic and it's kind of hard to know what the meeting's going to do until you have the meeting. But Obama had it figured out, I guess.

And the pope, I think, showed that he wasn't going to be manipulated by the president. So they each kind of did their global leader thing. And, of course, this recent activity with Cuba, regardless of what you feel about Cuba, and there are some really strongly felt opinions about Cuba, it does show the important role the Holy See can play in the world,

especially in diplomacy, because of its unique kind of soft power, influence power, and its convening power, being able to bring people together. And because it doesn't need to take credit for it, it can work clandestinely. That was very important for that thing to get that far that nobody get the cat out of the bag too quick.

JE: Well, I believe Pope Francis had worked on that a long time before that meeting with the president. Probably before the president even knew he was working on the Cuba situation.

FR: Yeah, every pope has sought an end to the embargo from an humanitarian point of view. And restoration of diplomatic relations, because the Holy See always takes the position that it's better to dialogue than not.

I kind of agree with him on that. I've been to Cuba. Look around, there's no American's there, just a few tourists. I happen to think that if Americans were there, being good Americans, that more and more people are going to realize the exceptionalism is real in this country.

So I think it's healthy that we have people out there, business out there, provided we can get it on a way where it doesn't just embolden Castro, where it actually emboldens the people. And there's some technical things about that. We can talk about it if you want to, but it's very important that we make the right kind of deal. And I'm not totally comfortable that this president will do that.

JE: Pope Francis could have met a president who didn't agree with him who could have said, "No, I believe the embargo ought to be in place."

FR: Right.

JE: But he did meet a Barak Obama who said, "I agree with you."

FR: In fact, yeah, in fact, it's kind of parallel to the symmetry between Reagan's anti-communism and Pope John Paul's. Now you had a president who said, "I want to restore relations and eliminate the embargo," and a pope that wanted to. And it worked out very well diplomatically.

JE: And the president, of course, as any president will do in anything, was criticized by many factions here in the United States for taking that stand. And I don't know if that will become part of the presidential race or not, how Cuba is—

FR: Yeah, yeah, to me, I think it's fine to have diplomatic relations and it's fine to open up for business and all that, provided we have the right safeguards. You know, it worked in Eastern Europe because the Internet was new and nobody knew how to control it. So they had open Internet, open access to what was going on in America. Ceausescu had said that Americans didn't have enough food to eat and roamed around wearing bearskins.

Well, the people of Romania could see, "Nope, that's not the case at all. They got food, we don't."

So we need to have open Internet, we've got to have protections for the rule of law, and particularly, there's one thing that happens in Cuba that's very bad. Companies there, like the Spanish and Italian hotel chains, don't pay their workers. They pay the government in euros or dollars and the government pays the workers in these Cuban pesos.

So, A, the government haircuts them, and, B, the government is the one that the people have an allegiance to, not their employer. So how do you build a feeling of team, culture, being a part of the hotel, or part of the factory, when the government's the one paying you. We've got to change that.

Chapter 18—2:20

China

John Erling: Religious freedom was a focus for President Bush. He had visited China and his hope was that China would not fear Christians who gather to worship openly. However, there was a delicate balance going on here. Talk about—

Francis Rooney: Yeah, the China thing is very interesting. First of all, one thing I did when I first got there, the president went to China and he turned around to Hu Jintao and said, "You need to be honest about religious freedom here."

So I immediately called a press conference and said, "See, this shows why our great president and the United States are the most vigorous defenders of religious freedom. And what a great thing that we have this mission with the Holy See, which shows the synergy of the US and the Holy See and our commitment to religious freedom."

And, of course, the Holy See classic stiletto diplomacy. The next day, in an Italian newspaper, "Unnamed sources rebuke the United States and are reminded that the Holy See doesn't need anybody to tell them about religious freedom."

That was the first time I got slapped across the face. They were right but it was good and it was a good opportunity for me to say something that was good for our mission and good for the president. So I didn't really care if the Holy See didn't like it or not.

And I put in the book about religious freedom in China and the Holy See's view that it's kind of like a birdcage. This analogy that the Archbishop Shelley said, "Well, sometimes they'll allow more religious freedom and the bird can fly around. And sometimes they restrict it, depending on the flavor of the day and what's been going on."

But the Holy See takes a very long-term view. They would actually not say it, but I think there's an element of, "You can't go too far too fast." You've got to play for the long ball and let the country build, middle class build, you just don't want a Tenement Square.

- JE:** The Chinese government wants to control the Catholic church within its borders, so you have that going on. The relationship today between China and the church, talk about that.
- FR:** Yeah. That's what I mean. The Holy See is willing to play for the long ball and not challenge China openly.
- JE:** Okay.
- FR:** But at the same time, they make the argument that China is better off with an entity that they can speak with, with a hierarchy, than these one-off evangelical preachers roaming around that nobody's got any kind of control over them. I don't think China necessarily buys all that, but some people do. And there is a basis of continual dialogue between the Holy See and members of the Chinese government.
- JE:** Well, is it true that bishops opening committed to Rome could be jailed?
- FR:** Oh yeah. They dealt with a couple of them just a couple of years ago.
- JE:** So—
- FR:** And every once in a while they'll slap a few people around like that to make sure that the political climate is of the right dialogue that they want it to be.

Chapter 19—2:20

Laura Bush and the Pope

- John Erling:** You're back in Rome after the holidays and the pope says to you, "So, we're going to see Mrs. Bush?"
- Francis Rooney:** Yeah that was interesting. At that time, Mrs. Bush wanted to come over to see the pope as part of a delegation to the Turin Olympics. The rumor was that she probably wouldn't come unless she could see the pope. It was that important to her. And the pope had not at that time seen any private visitors, he'd only seen presidents and ambassadors. And large groups.
- So I had to go and see the secretary of state, Colonel Sodano, and I said, "Look, Mrs. Bush wants to come and see the pope."
- And he said, "Well, that's really difficult, you know, 'cause the pope only see presidents."
- I said, "Well, she's the closest thing you're going to get to the president right now."
- So finally he called back and he said, "Tell you what? Let's just make it a private visit, that way we can get around the—" And, of course, it had all the trappings of a full state visit. It had the whole bit, you know, walking through the same place I did. All the guards there, the exchange of gifts, it was a state visit in everything but name only.

JE: You know what they talked about?

FR: Yeah, I sat there with them. We talked about a lot of things. One interesting thing we talked about, since Barbara, the daughter, was there, had worked in an AIDS clinic in South Africa. I brought that up and we talked about that.

And the pope got talking about the situation here in Africa where Saudi Arabia had allowed the Wahabbis to operate Madrassas and sit here in Africa. This was back in 2005. Okay? And what the pope was concerned about, he said, "Look, this is going to radicalize Muslims that have heretofore not been radical." They've been fairly secular Muslims like Indonesians or Malaysians. We're talking Niger, Molly, Cameroon, Nigeria, for the most part, and that's in truth and fact happened. These Wahabbis.

Saudi Arabia said, "Just don't cause trouble at home in the kingdom and we'll help you financially go run Madrassas away."

Well, okay, that's a Faustian bargain, which has resulted in Boko Haram and Al Qaeda of the Maghreb and all that kind of stuff now.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

FR: He talked about that with Mrs. Bush back then.

JE: Hm. What do you think came out of that meeting? After effects from it?

FR: I think that Mrs. Bush really enjoyed the meeting, was very honored to have the time with the pope, and her daughter. He'd laid the groundwork for the president to come. She definitely made sure that they knew that the president wanted to come as soon as he could.

And I think the pope got a lot out of meeting Mrs. Bush. I mean, here's she's a wonderful person, a very religious person as well, a daughter, Barbara, the same. So I think that was good for the pope to see.

JE: And she had such an easy, sweet personality.

FR: Super nice.

JE: Right.

FR: Super nice.

Chapter 20—2:45

Well-educated Vatican Leaders

John Erling: The leadership positions in the church are filled with very well-educated men.

They speak fluently in many languages, knowledgeable to speak about the issues of many countries.

Francis Rooney: Oh yeah.

JE: You are well-educated yourself, but did you ever feel intimidated around any of these guys?

JE: Sure. You know, I got enough trouble becoming moderately to severely fluent in Spanish and here you're talking to some guy who can speak six languages.

The pope one day, one of his blessings, even spoke Wareni to a bunch of Paraguayans. Pretty amazing people. And their depth of knowledge is very deep, whether it's Kosovo or Eritrea or something in Asia, their country knowledge is very good and they're very, very intent diplomatically to know what's going on and to be able to express the frilly cogent diplomatic position on the part of their values.

JE: I don't know if you thought of it this way, but that's what they've done all their life is to study.

FR: Yeah.

JE: That's what they've done, that's their area of expertise. And so you'd have to look at them as, "Okay, they're an expert in that."

FR: There was one lunch we were doing, I had a bunch of monsignors there and George Weigel. They were talking about deep stuff, as only George Weigel can do. And I didn't understand but half of what they were saying. There's got to be, talking about the Peace of Westphalia.

Well, I got up from the table, walked into my study, googled the Peace of Westphalia, made a few quick notes, came back and sat down. And when they got to this point, I said, "Oh yeah, what about this part of the Peace of Westphalia over here?" You know?

JE: And they were impressed.

FR: Exactly, briefly. Not for very long.

JE: Cardinal Tauran, who is an expert in Islam religion, he was one of the harshest critics, I believe, of the US role in Iraq. But he didn't hold any ill will toward the United States. He said the central problem with Islam was their failure to acknowledge the right of non-Muslims to exist.

FR: He's right. And as long as you're going to interpret the Koran literally you're going to have a problem. Because the Koran literally says everybody else is apostate but us. That's a problem.

JE: Yeah.

FR: That's the immutable object meeting the irresistible force. Cardinal Tauran is so clear, very gentle, like Pope Benedict. He's not a brazen speaker like Carlo Martino and a few of the other people that spoke out against the United States. He's very soft-spoken but every word counts.

He made a speech a while back, I use it in my speeches, about what's the Holy See's diplomacy? And he says, "Well, our role is to contest systems or ideas that corrode the dignity of the person or threaten world peace." Simple.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

FR: Says it all. You could write an entire book about what those words mean diplomatically for them.

JE: Now many of these things could go on with further discussion but we can move on.

FR: Sure.

JE: And, again, I refer to your book, *The Global Vatican*. I want to talk about that here in a moment.

Chapter 21—3:50

Pres. Bush Visits the Pope

John Erling: In 2007, President Bush said he would come to visit with you and Kathleen. And others met him at the airport.

Francis Rooney: Oh yeah, that was great.

JE: Tell us about that.

FR: I'd never seen a presidential visit in an official capacity like that, so we're out there and the Vatican, as a show of respect for the president, sent two greeters. They sent Peter Wells, who's from Guthrie, as a matter of fact. And they sent a cardinal that had been the Nuncio ambassador in India.

So the Italian protocol officer came up and said, "One priest has to go."

And I said, "What do mean?"

He said, "Well, Ron Spogli is here, the ambassador to Italy, as is the ambassador of Italy to the United States. So you have you but you have two Holy See representatives. So there's one more Holy See representative than there is a Republic of Italy representatives."

So I went up to Denise Burch, head of advance for the president and I explained it. I said, "Do you think you could talk to this guy?"

She went up to him and she said, "Listen, the only reason we're coming here is to see the pope. If the Vatican had an airport we would not be landing in Italy." That's what she told this guy.

This guy scurried off with his tail between his legs like, you know, a wounded dog. It's pretty good.

But then, the president had a great visit. He's always so enthusiastic, you know, bounce off the plane, rode into town. It's late so we got some sleep.

The next day, Kathleen had the breakfast with Mrs. Bush and Sister Eugenia that I mentioned, and I had meetings with the president.

Then we went to see the pope. Part of the meeting was just the president, part of the meeting was with me and John Negroponte in there. Then we met with the secretary of state as well, the president. And then we went to lunch. And when we were leaving the Holy See to go have lunch and to go to a diplomatic reception for the staff and stuff, the State Department people of all the missions, the limo died, right in the middle of Rome. It was too hot.

It was really interesting. The crowds were coming in, making the usual types of gestures that crazy Italians do when they're excited.

JE: And you were in the same car with—

FR: Me, Negroponte, the president, and I think, Josh Bolton, I'm not sure. Anyhow—

JE: And so you see the crowd coming up closer and closer?

FR: Yeah, and so the president opened the door, which drove the Secret Service crazy and waved to them and calmed them down, which was really great. They kind of calmed down and it took the guy about five minutes to get the car going.

And I asked the president, "Has this ever happened to you before?"

He said, "It only happened one time in Dallas."

JE: Aah.

FR: Which I thought was kind of—

JE: Yeah.

FR: ...hmm. But anyway, they got it going. And then we got to the building where this meeting was going to be. I'd set up with this group called Saint Ajidia, which is a nongovernmental organization that does peacekeeping missions and humanitarian help. Really good folks. And the advance team that had been over there for so long figuring all the details out had not figured out that the limo would not fit through the gate of this mansion we were going to.

So the guy tried, you know how you try to sandwich your way in? So finally the president says, "Stop it!" Opens the door and says, "Let's get out of here."

So we just walked, it's decent, the Secret Service scurrying along and the president walks fast, I mean, he is a really good athlete. Keeping up with him, you've got to walk fast.

JE: Just kind of describe his personality and what he's like when you're up close, as you've been with him.

FR: He, he is a really great person, I mean, he's a strongly religious person, strongly principled person, kind, warm, got a great sense of humor.

JE: Do you think he came off differently on the national television stage than he did as you got to sit and visit with him?

FR: No, no.

JE: He's was just the same?

FR: No, he used to crack jokes and stuff and was very approachable on the national stage. You could see his strong commitment to his principles. I think that came out, you know, in his religion and everything.

JE: Interesting, you said in your book when he saw Archbishop Harvey from Wisconsin, he said, “How about them Brewers?”

FR: Yeah, in fact, just before we were getting out of the limo, I said, “Okay, Mr. President, this is Archbishop Harvey from Wisconsin.” That’s my job is to make sure he’s tuned up to do something good, you know?

JE: So the president—

FR: He’s a huge baseball fan, President Bush.

Chapter 22—3:00

Time to Come Home

John Erling: As the president left, 2007, you began to feel that maybe it was time for you and Kathleen to return to the United States.

Francis Rooney: We’d hit it hard. We really hit it hard, I mean, from day one. We had more receptions in the first six months of that mission than any other had had the entire time they’d been there. We just wore the place out.

JE: We talked a lot about what you did. But Kathleen was your partner.

FR: Totally.

JE: And you talked about all these functions that you have. So she was very involved in all of that, I would imagine.

FR: She did a fantastic job of organizing the social aspects of representing the United States. She was always there, no matter how tired, to go to one more thing, if we had to go to it. She never said no to anything. I mean, you got to manage the butler and the cook and the protocol people and the seating and the menu cards and there’s all this elaborate—even inviting someone to dinner over there is an elaborate process. It takes a village. She really did a fantastic job and we had tons of coffees, cocktail receptions, dinners, lunches, breakfasts, you name it, we had it all. We wore the house out. We did tons of events.

So, you know, after the president left, and that happens a lot on these kind of deals, you get toward the end of the second term, a lot of your friends in the White House are all leaving, going to private industry. It was kind of time, we’d been there a while. I’d been basically doing nothing but ambassador things since the first week of February of 2005.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). So you did a total of three years?

FR: It's three years when you include the time in the State Department before we got over there.

JE: As you've reflected many times in this experience, what are your takeaways from it?

FR: I learned a lot, so did Kathleen, so did the kids. We all learned a lot, both about our church and about the role of the United States in the world. And certainly learned a lot about Italy. I mean, there's nowhere in Rome we haven't been, a few times.

And also, it was very interesting, like I said, working with the embassy staff and having to confront a different management challenge. Which, Kathleen, she had to change out a butler, she had to change out a chef, here in a foreign country. She had her share of personal issues to deal with as well.

JE: Did it deepen your own faith, do you think?

FR: Yeah it did, in a funny kind of way because Archbishop Chaput, before I went over there, made a comment to me. He said, "Don't lose your faith over it."

JE: Ah.

FR: "When you see all the kind of sausage-making secularism that goes on, 'cause they're men, you know, and they're powerful men." And so he made me just ignore all the process.

Like there was one time, we were sitting in a St. Peter's mass, I forget which holiday, and I'm seeing all these cardinals over there kind of jockeying for position and who gets to sit in the front row and all that. And I'm sitting there thinking, "That guy said something bad about the president. And this guy here hates the United States. And this guy did this guy dirty." Because you know everything. You really have access to incredible information.

But then I said, "Well, I'm sitting here thirty feet from the bones of St. Peter and I've gotten to meet the pope, so forget all these guys."

JE: But that's good for anybody who listens to this to say, "Don't lose your faith over it," because every church in every denomination has the yin and the yang that goes on, and the making of the sausage. So it's good for everybody to remember that whether you're in the Vatican or whether you're in a Baptist church in Tulsa.

FR: Yes. Stephen Covey made a fortune as a management consultant with one phrase: Keep the main thing the main thing.

JE: Right.

Chapter 23—3:30**The Church and Terrorism**

John Erling: Pope Francis is coming here this fall. Are you invited to any of that?

Francis Rooney: I don't know. What I've heard from the State Department is the US Conference of Catholic Bishops is control attendance at the big mass at Shrinny Immaculate Conception. The hope of the State Department is that all the past ambassadors are invited.

JE: Terrorism, the group known as ISIS, is there a place for the Catholic church in this war? ISIS can't be reasoned with, can a church even get themselves in terrorism?

FR: Yeah I would make the argument the Holy See's form of diplomacy is particularly useful in dealing with these kinds of issues because we've come to learn the hard way that hard power has limited value in that kind of country, where it's a desert, where the people are uneducated, where they don't have an economy, what economy they do is based on narcotics, other than oil. These are very difficult parts of the world.

So the Holy See's soft-power voice of reason, of persuasion, is an useful diplomatic tool. The other fact of the matter is that they have a particular, call it standing, if you will, as a religion, to speak about religion. And people are starting to write about that more and more now that the religions of the world need to be speaking up about one of their brethren, the Islamic one, that's going to become hijacked by a sect, a bad sect. And that religions can talk to each other, whereas secular people may be able to be impeached and say, "Well, you're just a country. You just want a hegemonic advantage." Where the Holy See doesn't. The Holy See is pure.

That way, sometimes when they say things, they can't be criticized and undermined as readily in what they're trying to say. So I think those are important opportunities for the Holy See's diplomacy to add value.

And so, you're starting to see more and more of it right now. Muslims taking responsibilities for Islam. One guy, an Egyptian guy, in December, wrote in the Wall Street that, "This is not my Islam."

Admiral Friedman here a while back spoke up about the need for Muslims to confront their religion. And the pope's been saying that. Those are all healthy, healthy starts. We're a long way from the end.

JE: We need to do more of that because it also helps educate America at large.

FR: Yeah.

JE: Because they're trying to sift through this themselves.

FR: And a lot of people are appeasement oriented. I don't believe it will work. It hasn't worked in England. So when people speak up about this maybe it will keep people from becoming appeasement oriented. And maybe crystallize some people's thoughts.

These are very difficult concepts, but you look at the guy who was burning the Korans in Florida, two years ago. I went nuts when General Petraeus spoke up against that. I said, “What is that guy fighting for?”

And then this recent *Charlie Hebdo* business. You know, the first one of those happened in 2005, when I was in Rome.

JE: Tell us what that is.

FR: That was when there was the cartoon that had the rockets come out of Mohammed’s head. They published it in a Danish publication so their radical terrorists started murdering people and bashing in store fronts and things like. We called a press conference and talked about that the United States is the strongest committed nation in the world to religious freedom and freedom of the press. And these kind of things have to be taken seriously and you can’t appease your way out of it.

JE: We hear people say that they want to stomp out terrorism. Do you think we can ever stomp out terrorism?

FR: Um, I don’t think we know how this radical Islamic business is going to end, but we know that some day it will. Everything comes to an end. Sooner or later it will be solved. Now there may be some different terrorism of a different kind of a different time, in the kind of world we have now that’s so interconnected and open. But I think there are some things we need to do to hasten the demise of radical Islamic segments. In that we can do a better job in some areas than we are. None of which involves using American ground troops, other than Special Forces.

Chapter 24—3:43

Advice to Students

John Erling: So young people headed to college, coming out of college, what kind of advice do you give to these people?

Francis Rooney: I would say, to paraphrase Ben Franklin, that people who will choose security over freedom deserve neither. And that these things like free press, things like freedom of religion are hard-earned by a bunch of people who put their whole life into it. All these founding fathers were the wealthiest leaders of the country and they all died broke. They put it all in the United States. And to go waste that by being scared to do hard things, or confront bad people, is really unfortunate.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

FR: And we’ve seen a lot of countries go down that road. I mean, you look at Europe. They’ve gotten to where they don’t stand for anything. Interestingly enough right now, you’re

seeing France and Spain perk up after that *Charlie Hebdo* business. They've passed some very, very invasive, restricting the freedom new laws to monitor people that access radicalized websites and things like that. They don't have a fourth amendment over there. They going to start to take some of the harsh measures that you would take if you consider there's a war.

JE: If you consider there's a war.

FR: If you consider radical Islamic terrorism a war you can look at it through a different lens than, what did Obama call it? An overseas contingency operation, or something ridiculous. If you look at it as a war then you apply wartime levels of containment interdiction. You don't attach fourth amendment rights to criminals, to terrorists, to enemy combatants, and you start to look at it in a little different lens.

JE: We should also point out that people are dying for their faith when an ISIS terrorist would somebody if they're a Christian, they kill them.

FR: Yeah.

JE: If they own up to it. I want those who are going to listen to this twenty-five, fifty years from now, that people actually died for their faith in this day and age.

FR: Yeah, how about that video of the twenty-one Christians in Libya?

JE: Yeah. Well, I thank you for sharing about Manhattan and your experience at the Vatican. Is there anything I haven't said or you would like to proclaim?

FR: Well, I'm just thankful to have been from Oklahoma and to have a company in Oklahoma. It's a great place to have a company. We've worked in a lot of foreign countries, and certainly a lot of parts of the United States, and have never had as good of workers, as decent of people, as the people in Oklahoma. I think that's been a big part of our strength here in our success.

And Texas is quite similar, but Texas is more complex and more diverse. And I just feel really fortunate that we've had a lot of good people here that have worked together to do something bigger than any one of us individually.

JE: Was that a tough adjustment coming from the Vatican back to the office of Manhattan? Was that a big adjustment?

FR: No, the only thing that was tough was over the course of 2009 and '10, and '11, I realized we had to make some changes and turbo charge this operation again. That the war was different. Some of our guys maybe needed a little bit of, like I said, that spiritual tune-up. Now I feel good with the new team we've got in place. I think we've saved the best of Manhattan and we've brought in some new blood. And I think we're retuned and I think we're going to be able to face the next generation competently.

JE: And I would imagine the experience of the Vatican and managing people and your experience there certainly add to applying that as a CEO of Manhattan.

FR: Yeah, the only downside is I saw what we had to do as soon as I got back. I talked to Kathleen, she agreed, and I just didn't want to fool with it. I just had three years of ambassador life and just wasn't prepared to dig in. I did a disservice to Natalie and all the other people in the company. We probably should have dealt with these problems in 2009 and '10.

Now, on the other hand, if the team that we've got now works out, they're here a long time, and they do the kind of things that we hope they can do, we'll be glad that we waited and got them, because we might not have got them in 2010. We got them in 2014.

JE: Yeah. Oklahoma's proud of Manhattan because you represent this state's and many, many entities in the United States, so thank you for that. And thank you for visiting with us.

FR: Well, thank you. I appreciate the chance to do this.

Chapter 25—0:33

Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening everyday to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time on *VoicesofOklahoma.com*.