

# A Yale man with a natural-born proclivity to his country's service

## Joseph Reed

■ BY JACK SHORT

Under-Secretary-General Joseph Reed may have a long and distinguished career in service to the United States, but he can still be chased from a room by a group of rowdy Mahjong players.

It happened at the Gasparilla Inn & Club recently, as he sat down to discuss his prestigious life and career. He took the group with a grain of salt, displaying the grace and good humor of a diplomat, and sat down in the corridor to continue the conversation.

Joseph was born in New York City and educated in Massachusetts at Deerfield Academy. He and his family were friends with the Bushes, and he and George H.W. Bush are still very close friends.

After graduating from Deerfield, Joseph went to Yale where he studied history until graduating in 1961. It had been decided long before that, though, that he would have a career in foreign service.

"I knew I wanted to get into international affairs - I knew that," Joseph said. "Whitney Griswold was then president of Yale, and he and my father and Eugene Black - who was the president of the World Bank - the three of them cooked up the fact that I would go to Washington and serve in Mr. Black's cabinet right away. Oh, I was so busy - my goodness. It was, in those days, non-stop lending of money for reconstruction and development in the developing world."

He traveled extensively throughout Asia and Africa during his years as private secretary to Mr. Black.

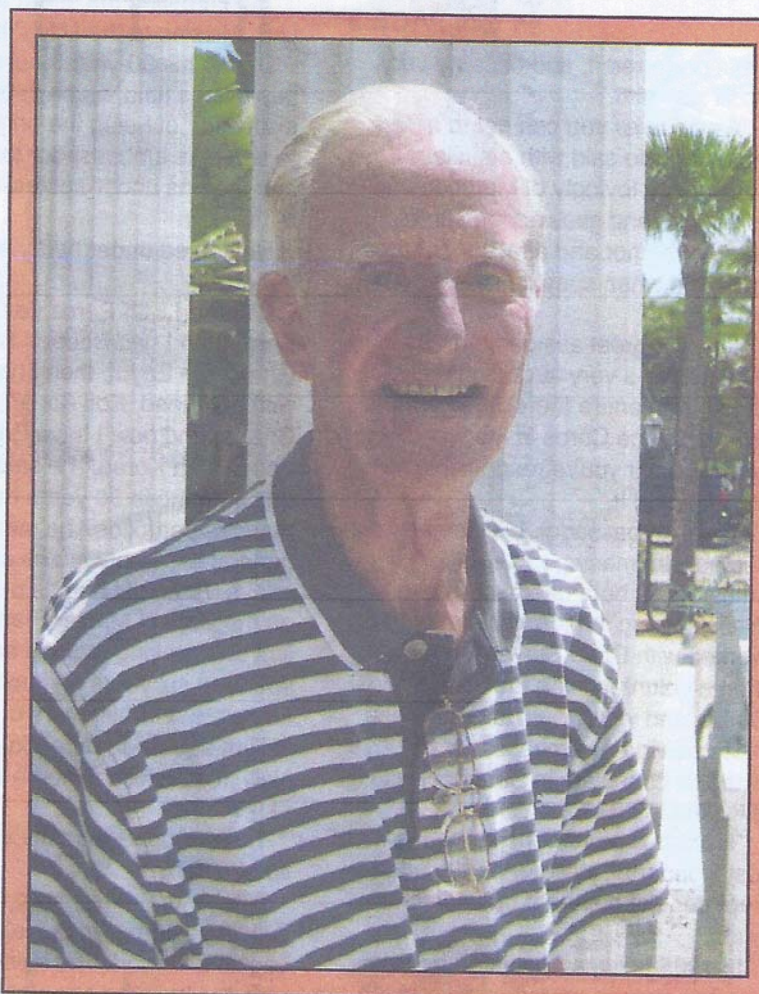
In 1967 he went to work for Chase Manhattan bank where he served as chief of staff to chairman David Rockefeller for 17 years.

"We traveled to 70 countries together," Joseph said.

His most memorable experience during that time came from a visit to Machu Picchu, which he summed up in one word - magical.

In 1981 he was appointed to his first diplomatic position.

"Mr. Reagan and Mr. Rockefeller were close, and so Mr. Rockefeller recommended me," he said. "Mr. Rockefeller



Joseph Reed

was very close to King Hassan of Morocco through the bank. So it was a logical extension."

The result of that recommendation?

"For my sins," he joked, "President Reagan called me and asked me to serve as ambassador to the kingdom of Morocco, America's oldest friend."

He meant this literally, he said, as Morocco was the first country to recognize the United States. He chuckled when he spoke about a related letter between Morocco and Thomas Jefferson, then secretary of state. Jefferson wrote that the U.S. was a "poor country, and its prospects are not very good."

He spoke French with King Hassan, who Joseph said al-

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**HOMETOWN:**

**OCCUPATION:**

**HOBBIES:**

**FAVORITE BOOK:**

**FAVORITE TV SHOW:**

**FAVORITE MOVIE:**

**THE PERSON I ADMIRE MOST:**

**LIKES:**

**DISLIKES:**

New York City

Diplomat

International relations

"The President's Club"

PBS's "News Hour" and "Washington Week"

"Casablanca"

George H.W. Bush and Ronald Reagan

George H.W. Bush and Ronald Reagan

The blood-drenched tyrant in Syria, and the lilliputian dictator in North Korea

*Personal file*



## PROFILE - A man of peace, of wisdom, of humor

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ways preferred it, and became very close with him.

"As close as you can get to a monarch," he said with a smile.

He spoke lovingly of Morocco and its people, and showed the same blend of humor and affection for them as he did when speaking of friends and family.

"It was a great assignment," he said. "I managed a very large embassy. During my tenure there we had the largest Peace Corps in the world. As a senior officer you're responsible for coordinating it."

As an ambassador, his life has intersected with many people under circumstances both happy and sad. While serving in Morocco, Joseph worked with Chris Stevens, who was then a volunteer with the Peace Corps, and who would later be killed while serving as ambassador to Libya when its consulate in Benghazi was attacked in 2012.

"He was a peach," he said. "He was just wonderful, just wonderful, and I kept track of him right up until the end."

In 1985 he was appointed by Reagan to serve as representative of the United States to the Economic and Social Council, one of the three arms of the U.N. General Assembly, and as deputy permanent representative at the United States Mission.

After two years, he was nominated by Reagan to serve as under-secretary-general of the United Nations for political and General Assembly affairs.

"So I crossed the street from the U.S. Mission to the U.N.," he said.

During his 30-year tenure and various offices held, he has earned the distinction of being the only American to serve as ambassador to the U.N. and then as under-secretary-general of the U.N.

He served under many secretaries general.

"I started with Pérez de Cuéllar from Peru, then I had Boutros Boutros-Ghali from Egypt, then I had 10 years with my friend, Kofi Annan from Ghana, and now I have Ban Ki-moon from South Korea," he said.

During those 30 years he has had "various portfolios," he said, including general assembly affairs and public affairs. Recently he has been working on the Capital Master Plan, a \$2 billion undertaking that will have spanned six years and involves a complete refurbishment of the one-million-square-foot headquarters in New York, which is home to 6,000 employees.

The remodel was truly an international effort.

"We're just now getting back into the building ... next week we're bringing back the artwork," he said. "We had to redo the building completely, and the facade. We redid the windows exactly as they were done in 1947, and guess where they were built? China. Then we shipped them to Mexico to be assembled and then had Canada bring them to New York, so that was the United Nations."

He was proud to say the project is currently on time and on budget.

He spoke with great enthusiasm about his service in the U.N.

"I call the U.N. the 'Parliament of Man,'" he said. "The U.N. is not one of the luxuries of international life."

He stressed its unique and crucial role as what he called "the only governing body in a position to facilitate cooperation among all nations and to promote peace and security and development, protect human rights, and strengthen international law."

"On a daily basis," he said, "The U.N. provides food to 90 million people, assists 36 million refugees, oversees 120,000 peacekeepers on four continents and vaccinates 58 percent of the world's children (saving 2.5 million lives a year). Yearly, it assists approximately 30 countries with elections."

For some countries, he said, the transition to those democratic elections can require a tremendous amount of work and care, as in Myanmar where he's played a role in the nascent democracy.

"I've been very much involved in recent years, with the secretary general, in Myanmar, formerly Burma," he said. "I've traveled extensively through Burma. I'm in communication with (their) current president. It's a fragile democracy because it's been under five decades of harsh military rule. For whatever my skills are, Kofi Annan thought that I could advance the quest for democracy in a state that was closed to the world, hermetically shut. But now that we've opened it up, sanctions have been lifted. There have been exchanges of diplomatic

relations between the United States and Burma. The European Union has lifted their sanctions. Progress with a capital 'P.'"

He attributed that progress in part to President U Thain Sein's progressive, far-seeing attitude.

The key to the kind of careful diplomacy required, he said, is listening, taking an issue, discussing it, taking it apart, moving the parts back and seeing whether the puzzle can be fixed.

"It's time consuming, and there's a tremendous element of trust," he said. "I'm very proud of what I've done in Myanmar. It's a wonderful country with glorious people."

His passion for the human welfare and dedication to diplomacy have resulted in some impressive laurels from countries too numerous for an exhaustive list.

He has been awarded the Legion of Honor by France, he said, for his service from 1987 to 1991 as chief of protocol for George Bush Sr.'s White House. During that time, he organized more meetings between then-president of France Francois Mitterrand and President Bush than Bush had with any other head of state.

He feels a strong connection to France both through his family (his father and his wife's mother were French), his love of the French language, which he calls the "language of diplomacy," and his travels and experiences there.

He is one of fewer than 50 people to be awarded the Yale medal, which he

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received in 2010 for his work coordinating the efforts of the Yale University Press and the China International Publishing Group. Together, they published works on Chinese painting, ceramics, architecture and much more.

"Everything had to be agreed upon, every comma, everything," he said.

The scale of the 15-year project is staggering.

"Our last publication was on Chinese silks and we had 437 scholars from around the world working on that volume," he said.

He was also involved in the negotiations between his alma mater and Peru for the return of thousands of artifacts taken from Machu Picchu in 1910 by explorer Hiram Bingham. For his successful efforts, Peru awarded him the Order of the Sun, the highest award bestowed by the nation of Peru

to commend notable civil or military merit.

He is now taking what seemed to be more of a working vacation than simply a relaxing vacation on Boca Grande. Here, he and Marie, his wife of 53 years, enjoy the view from their house in Seawatch. He also spends time at the beach club when he's not working.

"I have what I like to call 'R & R,'" he smiled.

He admitted, though, that he still spends two or three hours a day on the phone with headquarters.

It is unsurprising, considering his devotion to his post, that U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had this to say about Ambassador Reed, "Like my predecessors as Secretary-General, I have welcomed Joseph Verner Reed's advice and support on a wide range of matters, gained through his rich and varied diplomatic career serving both his country and the United Nations."