



**WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**TRANSCRIPT**

**INTERVIEW WITH JEAN CHRÉTIEN**

December 15, 2009  
Ottawa, Canada

**Participant**

*University of Virginia*

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December 15, 2009

**Russell Riley:** This is the Jean Chrétien interview, as part of the Clinton Presidential History Project. I'm very grateful that you made the time to allow me to come to Ottawa to do the interview. The first thing I want to do on the record, because there will be some scholars that will come to review this, is to refer anybody who may be looking at this to your memoir, *My Years as Prime Minister*, which I read yesterday. It's a very good read and has an enormous amount of very rich detail, and so anybody who wants to understand politics as you've experienced it ought to start there.

**Jean Chrétien:** There's another one that I wrote before, but it was from the period before I became Prime Minister. It was called *Straight from the Heart*.

**Riley:** Yes.

**Chrétien:** I enjoyed doing that, but happy that you find it an easy read. It's easy to read, so it was a good success in Canada.

**Riley:** It's a wonderfully interesting book. I've done interviews with [Fernando Henrique] Cardoso, [Václav] Havel, and Kim Dae-jung before seeing you, and in each instance I've had an opportunity—Kim, I can't remember whether he had written before, but Cardoso and Havel had, and you get a very interesting flavor from each leader about their kind of leadership.

**Chrétien:** Yes. They are both writers, accomplished as writers. I'm not.

**Riley:** Well, you're not, but the book reads as well as anything that I've read, and it's revealing of your character, I think.

**Chrétien:** I wrote it and I hope you learned something in reading it.

**Riley:** I certainly did. The one thing that I didn't find out is whether you're a better golfer than Bill Clinton.

**Chrétien:** This is a state secret. [laughter]

**Riley:** What is it like to golf with Bill Clinton?

**Chrétien:** You know, there are all these rumors about him, that he is always learning, some element of the game. Of course if you play alone with him, he's not playing a game of golf, he's practicing. People find it a bit annoying, which is why I got a few games with him, when we were alone. So he will hit five balls or six balls and my shoulder and my arm and my hand and so on, and repeat the process. So it's not like a real game of golf.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** And some people made fun of it. But if you play a match with him, he's just playing like anybody else, and he is not a bad golfer at all. I think he must be around a 12 handicap. He plays like—we had a good match, but he was a bit—I'm losing ground now, but we had a good match. He was probably a bit better than I, but sometimes I would win. Sometimes I would lose.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** That was fun. We had fun. The last time I saw him in New York he said, "Jean, we have to have a game of golf some day," and perhaps we should organize one, because New York is not very far from here. New York is an hour from here. People don't realize it, that Toronto and Ottawa, we can go to New York in less than an hour on a plane, so it's like going to Toronto, to go to New York.

**Riley:** Very close.

**Chrétien:** Yes, very close.

**Riley:** Did he focus on the game when he played with you, or was it an excuse to do diplomacy in a quiet setting?

**Chrétien:** We played a few with other partners. He loves golf. He's just absolutely in love with the game. You'd go in his office at the White House and he had about 20 putters with a history of each one that has been given to him. He even had a putter that was given to him that had belonged to John F. Kennedy.

**Riley:** Oh, yes.

**Chrétien:** And he had a collection of old golf balls and so on. So he is knowledgeable about it and he really loved the game.

**Riley:** Sure. One of the things that you said in your book is that when you became Prime Minister, you had three principal goals, one of which was to reassert Canadian independence from the United States. How easy or difficult was it to do that with Bill Clinton as President?

**Chrétien:** The problem was perception. My predecessor, Mr. [Brian] Mulroney, there was nothing he loved more than to be seen with George [H.W.] Bush, or even [Ronald] Reagan. He loved it and it was part of his mentality. I'd say that he always loved, when he was not the Prime Minister, to be seen with the big players and so on. And so it was he was so keen, looked so keen, that that made Canadians uncomfortable, or at least me uncomfortable.

**Riley:** Yes.

**Chrétien:** So the first day I met Bill Clinton, I said, “Mr. President, I don’t want to be too close to you, because I don’t want to look like we are the 51st state of America, and if I’m too close to you, I will look like another state. If I am independent enough I might do a lot of things that will be very useful to you, that the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] cannot do.” In fact, I repeated the same thing to George W. [Bush] when he became President. That was my attitude, because we’re very jealous of our independence, but we are so close to America. When you do 85 percent of your trade with the Americans, you have to be very close.

The trade in those days was more than \$1 billion a day. People were shocked when I revealed that to them, but 85 percent of our trade was with you. But what the Americans never knew is more than a quarter of your trade is with Canada, and with only a population of 32 or 33 million people. So I think it’s 35 states in the United States, who was the greatest exporter to Canada than anywhere else in the world, but the Americans don’t know that. That was something that always got me smiling a bit, because when there was always a large surplus of trade with America I would make the jokes, you know? They don’t know and don’t tell them, because I would read anything in the newspaper and the magazines, and they all would all talk about Japan and China. They never referred to Canada.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** But the reality is you had a huge trade deficit with us. It was easy with Mr. Clinton. If you look—probably I mentioned that in my book—at the number of trade problems we had when I became Prime Minister, despite the so-called closeness between Mulroney and Bush, and it went to virtually not more when I was there, because to be close with the President is not necessarily solving the problem.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** In your system, the President—it’s a very difficult job, because even if he has a lot of powers, he’s in charge of the biggest military power in the world and he has the key for the atomic bomb and so on, but in terms of the daily operation of the government, his control over that is tenuous compared to what the Prime Minister of Canada can do. And how many times I would discuss with either President Clinton or President Bush, and it was Congress, I think, that moved them. Here, especially when you have a majority government, the Prime Minister would never tell anybody, “I cannot deliver,” because if you cannot deliver, you have lost the confidence of the House. Of course unless it’s crazy—if it’s crazy, generally speaking, the Prime Minister would decide something. He has no problem to deliver. It’s not the situation with the American system, the President. It’s very frustrating for him and for us because we know that.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** So he would tell you, “I agree with you, but there’s nothing I can do.” A Prime Minister, if he says, “That makes sense,” it is done. So it’s amazing, because I’m close to you and I’ve been a political observer for generations now. I was elected in 1963. So it will be soon 50 years that—How your system functions, everybody looks at the President, but he proposes

and the Congress disposes. Here the executive and the legislative are controlled by the Prime Minister, and that makes a big, big difference.

**Riley:** Sure. Did you ever get the sense the American Presidents were jealous of your ability to move your system?

**Chrétien:** Americans think they have a very good system. Yes. It's not the biggest problem of America, inferiority complex, so you tend to defend your institutions rather than analyze them. But I am like that too. I think our system is better, so perhaps I'm biased. I've worked within the system for 50 years. But in reality, a Prime Minister can deliver more than a President. Of course, even if he wants to declare a war, you know here, he has a vote in the Senate. For us, to participate in any of these operations we don't even have to have the support of the House of Commons. I have made a move when it was based on just after I made a decision, you know? Consultation with the House of Commons of course for me was easy, because I had a majority government and my party supported me. There's always a danger to have a split in the party, but it was never a problem for me. So we don't need the same type of—the House of Commons does not have the constitutional power to stop you.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** Of course they both know that you do, yes. You might lose the government. It's much easier here.

**Riley:** You had mentioned that you had been a close student of American politics. I daresay that most Americans know—

**Chrétien:** But you have to understand my background. My father spent the first years of his life in Manchester, New Hampshire.

**Riley:** Oh, yes.

**Chrétien:** And when he back to Canada, it was ten years or something like that. So my grandfather moved to Manchester, New Hampshire. There was a big movement of Franco-Canadians going to New England. They called them the Canucks there.

**Riley:** Yes.

**Chrétien:** So I'm the product of that, and my father for 50 years was director of a small insurance, cooperative-type company called the Canado-Américain. To be a member of that, you had to be a French Canadian living in the United States or in Canada, and of course at that time, you had to be Roman Catholic. It was kind of a club, and in every town, the members of that association, Canado-Américain, will meet, and they would call it a group, and they would give a name to the group, and they would have meetings. They were not only insurance. It was a little social organization that was popular in those days but has been absorbed by another company lately. I still pay them a little bit of money in pensions. My dad was a director of that and going twice a year there, so that was his holiday. He would go with mom, and a few times we went with him. I remember going to see Ted Williams playing baseball in Boston.

**Riley:** Something else my son would find interesting about Canada.

**Chrétien:** Some Americans are always surprised by how much we know about your politics, while you don't know that we exist. Very often I would discuss with Bill Clinton about political affairs, expressing my views about American politics to him, and he knew that I knew. I saw the cover when he had a reference to me that I was knowledgeable about the public administration, but about politics too, because he could discuss what's going on in Texas, going on in California. One reason is I could not speak English until late in my life, so when I became a member of Parliament here, I could barely speak English. Every week I was reading news in *TIME* Magazine, and sometimes *Newsweek*, from one cover to the other. I knew about some states having referendums and so on because I was watching it on TV.

After the Congress election, when [Newton] Gingrich helped to give the majority to the Republicans, Bill was asking me what I thought, and in observation I said, "I'm looking from Canada and you're talking too much. You're on TV all the time. You think these guys are nice to you because they're nice when you're there, but they are out to trap you. That's their job. Even if they like you and they like them, they will do their job, so I think that you're talking too much." And I noted—probably others noted the same thing—he started to have less of these virtually two, three, press conferences a day he had, and he stopped.

Of course when you're in politics, there are always people around you who think that you have to be visible, but for me I learned it here. I will not talk to the press every day. I had a question period in the House of Commons and I will get out and they will ask me questions. "Take what I said in the House," because I respect the House and because I know them. They get you on all sorts of sidetracks and so on. I would meet them when I was in Ottawa after a Cabinet meeting, that's all, unless there was a special problem, but when it was just routine there is nothing more dangerous than the routine in politics.

**Riley:** Do you feel like your good rapport with Clinton was because you understood politics together, as well as policy?

**Chrétien:** But he loves politics, that's his life. Politics was my life and we knew each other, that it was like that. In one magazine at one time, they wrote that he had said I was perhaps his closest friend in politics.

**Riley:** Yes.

**Chrétien:** That was in *Newsweek*. I remember, I was very—he never repeated that, but I was close to him. I think that because of age and other reasons, Tony Blair was probably closer to him. And for me, as I said, I was not working to be close.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** That was my policy.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** You know, I was not seeking reasons to meet him, on the contrary, and the Canadians seemed to have liked it because it was my policy. For example, George W. Bush did invite me—but I never could accept—to the ranch, so the media was making—how come Chrétien is not going? I was not interested. It was part of my policy. Clinton, I would play golf with him, but I never sought to organize myself to let him know that one weekend he was going to Camp David he might have invited me. On the contrary. I had no desire. If I had to talk with him, I'd talk to him on the phone, and we're meeting each other so often that there's no need for that.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** It was part of my policy that I was not—because Mr. Mulroney was too close. I used to make a joke about him. I said he had gone fishing with President Bush, and I said, "I don't want to go fishing with the President of the United States, because I don't want to look like the fish," that type of joke, and the people would buy it. Because of my background, I'm necessarily close to America, because of my family.

**Riley:** Sure. Were there instances where you felt that you had to show specifically some independence?

**Chrétien:** No, because people understood that right away. I had made fun of Mulroney, and so they realized very quickly that I was to be different. That does not mean that I had not a good relation with Bill Clinton; I had very good relations with him, but I did not want to look like I was a buddy-buddy.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** It was the same thing with George W. Bush. Of course I had more political differences with Bush than with Clinton, but in terms of the administration, perhaps you should interview my nephew, Raymond Chrétien, who was in Washington for six years, who was a professional diplomat.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** He looks like Clinton. He's 6-foot-3. In fact, he was the young Ambassador that Clinton called by his first name. He would say, "Raymond, how is your old uncle?" I got the joke. So we were on the phone regularly, but there was no great desire, no need to socialize.

**Riley:** How well did you think Clinton understood Canada? Most Americans don't have a very good sense of Canada.

**Chrétien:** Yes, but they knew a bit about Canada through political interest. They had come here and told me they drove in Canada, in Montreal, in Ottawa, and so on.

**Riley:** They, being—

**Chrétien:** They had been here together.

**Riley:** Hillary [Clinton] and Bill?

**Chrétien:** Before he was—

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** A long time before, when he was Governor, or before.

**Riley:** Right, but you said “they.”

**Chrétien:** I did not believe them, but he had been in a place called Chelsea here, and the daughter is Chelsea [Clinton], so they more or less nicely said that they might have been inspired there for their daughter’s name. They knew, but they were interested in our policies. They questioned me, both of them, a lot about our health care; how I managed to have the health care that we have here. You spend 15 or 16 percent of your GDP [Gross Domestic Product] on health care and we spend barely 10 and everybody is covered. The myth that the right-wingers use is nonsense. They haven’t really looked. It’s functioning. We have problems when we have sometimes—not for big sickness—some lineups, but if you are suffering of a cancer or need a heart operation and all of that, it’s very good, and nobody risks to lose their house here, nothing like that.

When you make your calculation of taxes, nobody pays attention to the fact that an American will pay for his family six, seven, eight, nine thousand dollars to be covered for medical costs. Here in Canada, taxes are a bit higher, but we don’t pay a cent for our medical costs. It’s all paid by the state. Not the dental care or the eyes. If you want a nose job, the government does not pay, but on the basic needs, that’s covered by the government. So we would discuss that. We’ll discuss how we manage our gun control laws here. That is a problem in the United States.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** Even hanging. The Clintons were for hanging. I don’t think that it was very natural for them. Normally, a liberal tends to be—

**Riley:** Capital punishment.

**Chrétien:** —against it.

**Riley:** Yes.

**Chrétien:** And we had no problem here with that. So they would always ask me, how do you survive politically? Hillary will discuss that a few times we had dinner together, and she would always talk about how we manage political problems here, but they knew that I was, too, kind of a political animal, and we discussed that. But very often, in my chitchat with Bill, we will discuss American politics. I remember when he left, when it was his last Christmas, I visited the White House and it was after the election, and he knew about every county in Florida what happened and why is that. It was a fascinating discussion for me, but it was something that I observed from Canada.

**Riley:** Do you have the same grasp of Canadian politics that Clinton does of U.S. politics? I mean do you have the sense of what happens in each of the ridings?



**Chrétien:** Not each riding but each province, oh yes. But for me, I got elected to Parliament when I was 29 years old, and I was a Member of Parliament from 1963 to 1993, with a two-, three-year-period out, I quit and then came back.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** So I have been more than 40 years involved with public life. There's no district in Canada that I never visited. That was because we had to do the fundraising and here in Canada, we have stricter rules than yours, so it's more difficult. We have to do little dinners. I will make the joke that I have more rubber chicken in my body than anybody else, because I did that for 40 years.

**Riley:** You had a very good relationship with President Clinton.

**Chrétien:** Very good. And I still go to these global initiatives.

**Riley:** Right. Were there specific instances where you had serious disagreements with him? Can you tell us about any of that?

**Chrétien:** No. I tried to persuade him and I think I came close, to signing the land mine treaty. That was probably the one thing where he said no that I pushed him hard.

**Riley:** Was that because of Congress or was that because he just didn't—

**Chrétien:** Because of the military. At one time I thought he was there, and I'm told that the chief of the military threatened to resign, something like that, but that offended me. Not offended me, but I had secured the consent of [Boris] Yeltsin, conditional to Clinton, and we were discussing. There was always some excuse, like North Korea, but there was a way to go around that technically, that problem. Obviously the military did not want to sign it and so the Russians did not sign and the Chinese did not sign, but it was a great initiative by Canada.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** That led to the Ottawa Treaty and it was started at the political level by us in 1994.

**Riley:** Did you have a similar interest in the International Criminal Court?

**Chrétien:** Yes, we did that too. In fact, the first president, I forget the name, [ed. note: Philippe Kirsch] but he was a lawyer who had been Ambassador for us. He had been in Stockholm and he became the president of the Court. He was the negotiator for Canada and we did technically a lot of the work for that. We did not take all the credit, but we probably had been the one who worked the hardest on that, so I'm told. And in fact, our negotiator became—you can find the name.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** He was the first president of that court.

**Riley:** One place where you had a disagreement with American policy was over Cuba.

**Chrétien:** Yes. We had some discussions about the implementation of the law that was passed. It was the law with a provision for the Americans, for a Canadian to go to Cuba, would not get the permission to go back to the United States, type of thing.

**Riley:** Right. [Jesse] Helms-[Dan] Burton. Helms-Burton I think.

**Chrétien:** Yes. We had some problem with that, but no. I knew his position, he knew mine, and we would not fight over that. I always thought the Americans were wrong to have a boycott; that's the best way to keep [Fidel] Castro in power. For me it was so evident, because you gave a target to Castro, who could blame you on everything. I remember during the time I was Prime Minister I was in the Chamber of Commerce of New York, in a group, an economic club, whatever it was, and what I love when I make speeches, because we have the question period in the House of Commons here, so I love question period. I speak for 15 minutes, ask me a question on anything. So they had asked me a question about Cuba. "How come you do business with a communist regime like that, a dictator?" "Come on," I said. "You Americans for generations had a hell of a lot of good business with dictators of the right. This guy is a dictator from the left. It's the same darn thing for me. He's a dictator. I know that some day you will normalize your relation with them."

I don't know if you read that in my book, and I said, "You will normalize your relation with Cuba, but don't do it too fast, because by the time you do it, you will all be welcome in Canadian hotels." My God, the week after, the Chamber of Commerce wrote to Clinton to change his policy, because they realized that they were missing opportunities for nothing. It's all based on the political reality that the radicals, Cubans, are politically very active, and they'll vote against anybody who has changed the policy. The guys, they have to win the nomination to be a candidate. They promise not to touch it, year after year, in both parties.

**Riley:** You had met Castro on several occasions.

**Chrétien:** When I went to visit him, I was the first western leader in ten years to go to visit him, but he used my visit to make a terrible speech, and I was standing next to him. But it was typical of Fidel. He's a very nice, charming guy, a fantastic guy in many ways. He came here for the funeral of [Pierre] Trudeau, and I had met him at the UN [United Nations] too and so on, and as my wife speaks Spanish he was delighted to see that my wife spoke Spanish. She's not Spanish, she just learned it out of personal interest. And he was a fabulous character. I have not seen him lately, but if you spend a night with him, he talks all the time and is very knowledgeable.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** I remember the morning that he drove me back to the airport. You will be shocked by that. He said, "Mr. Prime Minister, do you realize, the stock market collapsed this morning?" It was the last damn thing that I was interested in and he knew that there was a big drop in the market in New York.

**Riley:** Did Clinton ask you about Castro, knowing that you had—

**Chrétien:** Well, we mentioned that in passing. He knew. There was nothing secret about it.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** Everything was above the table. They knew that we were doing business with them the same way that we do business with anybody. Very difficult to see, it's a communist there and you're doing business with the Chinese and the Russians, and communism is communism.

**Riley:** Exactly. One of the areas that President Clinton did have some impact on evidently in Canada during your tenure was Quebec. I wonder, did you have conversations with President Clinton privately about—

**Chrétien:** He would ask me. I did not take notes. Some take notes; I never took notes, so I don't know if one day he asked me that question. I was doing my job and some are very preoccupied of the way they would look like. I did the best I could; that was the best I could. The taking notes and trying to win an argument after that was—so I don't remember it. Of course it came and was discussed a few times, and I remember just what happened here is we were winning the referendum easily.

It was unclear about how many days before, when the leadership changed on the other side, and [Lucien] Bouchard had just lost the leg, and nationalists thought that God saved his life to take them to heaven and that type of thing. He became the leader and within days he turned it around, and went and we dropped by—we were at one time, seven points, one week before, when I decided to intervene. When I met him in New York at the UN it was the 50th anniversary of the UN. We discussed that briefly. I said I had just learned a few hours before that we had dropped into second place, so I said it's serious.

**Riley:** My guess is he would have been inquisitive about—

**Chrétien:** Yes, he asked me, but we were in kind of a rush because there was a lineup.

**Riley:** Of course.

**Chrétien:** I don't know, we might have taken five or ten minutes, and he was right to the point. He said, "Can I do something like that?" I said yes. I said, "What do you think about the splitting of Canada?" and if you have a chance to talk about it. I knew that he was in favor of a very united Canada, that was his official policy, and of course there was a question that was asked of him the day after that talk with me, along with the conversation, and he replied that it would be very bad for everybody if Canada was to split. That was very controversial here, but he was so—and he's still so popular in Canada that nobody got very offended by it, and I'm sure that it helped. I was very happy that I asked him to do that. Some of the nationalists were pissed off at me because I used it, but they did everything against me so you know—I'm sorry that I used this word. I don't know what that means. I'm French. *[laughter]*

**Riley:** Believe me, that's mild. I've heard much worse cussing than that.

**Chrétien:** So he was very useful, and after that we organized—that's a very funny little thing. We organized a group, a kind of international forum, on federalism, and it was [Stéphane] Dion

who was in charge of Federal-Provincial Relations who started that. He was a professor. He became the leader of the party, but it was very much too academic to succeed, I guess now. There have been other academics as the leader of the party, but it's out of power. Dion said to me, "I'd like to have a good speaker to open and close the convention. Would you help me, Prime Minister?" I said, "It depends. Who do you want?" He said, "I want Bill Clinton, and I would like to have [Ernesto] Zedillo from Mexico." Am I going to invite the President of the United States? So I talked with Bill and organized for him to come. He came to open the new Embassy here.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** We flew from here to the conference in Mont Tremblant, where he made his speech, and we played golf after that. I remember we finished playing golf, with trucks following us for light. So he came here and he made a fantastic speech that has been very well noticed. It was a very impressive presentation, because I saw him and he had no notes. He never used a note. He could have read some of his notes, but he just spoke off the cuff for 40 minutes about federalism. It was a hell of a presentation. You should try to find the text somewhere, very interesting, where he explained that federalism is the best system for any political organization. I remember the Premier of Quebec, who was a separatist, sitting right in front of him, was not too happy.

**Riley:** Not too happy?

**Chrétien:** No, because he was getting knocked down ad hominem, but in reality, it was hurting them, no doubt about it. It was a very useful presentation.

**Riley:** You said in your book at one point that there was a speech you had to give at a crucial moment, on Quebec, where you knew that although your preference was also to speak off the cuff, you had to be very precise in your language.

**Chrétien:** That is probably when I made the presentation on TV.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** When I came back from New York we were losing by eight points, and the referendum—people don't understand that. The referendum is a provincial endeavor, it's a state endeavor, so if there is a referendum in California on something, the President of the United States doesn't intervene, even if it could have an impact on the national politics. So I had the same problem; we were participating, but they didn't want us to participate too much, and the pride of the people, the federalists of Quebec, didn't want to be helped by the big brother. They felt they could win alone.

In the last week, I had to intervene, so I organized a rally in Montreal, where we had about 130,000 people, some said 150,000. Even the provincial Liberals were not happy with that endeavor of mine. I went on TV and I turned it around in the last week. Everybody blamed me after that, "Why did he not start at the beginning? It's always like that." They were all writing, saying I should not participate because I should mind my business, and after it was over, we won by 1.3 points, something like that, and they would all blame me, because why did I not start earlier, the same guys. The editorialists, they are not preoccupied about contradicting themselves

too much. They write something one day and something else the day after, and nobody picked them up too much on that, but a few letters to the editors, and if they are too tough, they don't print them.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** So it's not like us. Anyway, I had to work hard and save the day, and part of it was my discussion with Bill.

**Riley:** The separatism issue was something that he—

**Chrétien:** But he debated that. It was based on the notion that every—a lot of these people in Quebec, their nationalism is based on language and it is based on ethnicity, so if you have to divide all the world by ethnicity, you will have a hell of a lot of problems in many countries. China would split into 200 countries and India the same thing and all that, so he referred to that and said we have to learn that Canada has been a good example of living with two official languages. Half of the public in Canada are first or second or third generation of immigrants from all over the world, and the other half is either British or French. We the French, we represent about 23 percent of the population. Those coming from the British Islands are probably here representing 26, and the rest is all Italian, Greek, Romanian, Russian, now more from India and Pakistan and Latin America and so on. It's a melting pot of a different kind than yours, because here we are a formal ticket to—that's something that is not very popular in the United States, but you will have to live with it anyway.

**Riley:** Tell me about your relationship with President Clinton on trade issues. Did you generally find him to be—

**Chrétien:** That was, at the beginning, the first problem I had. When my party had opposed the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the United—the FTA [Free Trade Agreement] we call it. But when NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] came along, the negotiation was not quite finished. It was finished, but I campaigned with some modification of it, because I had to twist the position of my party. I was for it, FTA. I was a free trader within my party, but I was not winning. So when I became the leader, I had to maneuver the position of the party around. They had opposed FTA, but now we were with Mexico, so as it was, FTA was bilateral or too dangerous, but if there is more into the discussion, we can counter the weight of America and whatever. I campaigned that there will be a modification to the NAFTA, that Bill agreed to. But when I was elected—

**Riley:** He agreed with?

**Chrétien:** Modification.

**Riley:** Did it require pushing? Did you have to push him?

**Chrétien:** What happened is that he was worried. I am the new elected Prime Minister whose party position is ambiguous about it. So if I have declared the hell with that, that was the end of free trade. OK?

**Riley:** OK.

**Chrétien:** So he didn't want me to do that, and he mentioned that the first thing when he called me the night of the election, the morning after. I was at my cottage, I had my grandchildren just to listen to me talking with the President of the United States, and he mentioned that to me. Right away, before I was sworn in, I started to talk with the administration, and I named two bureaucrats. Eddie Goldenberg was in communication with your Ambassador [James] Blanchard. I was not even Prime Minister when I talked to Blanchard, and I think I called Blanchard into my office to explain to him that I needed something on water and I needed something—two other elements that probably are in the book.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** I talked to [Carlos] Salinas too. So they had no choice, they agreed that we were to modify that. There were some negotiations. Some say that I did not get as much as I wanted, but I got them to modify. Water was very important.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** There was some on labor condition and environmental condition I guess, and another problem. I'm speaking from—

**Riley:** Sure. Those details are in the book.

**Chrétien:** So yes. I was in touch with him, and I met him as soon as after—I don't know the date, but the vote was—and he won the vote. I have few votes, remember. Ross Perot called me and told me that he was to erect a monument for me. You read that.

**Riley:** Yes, in Texas.

**Chrétien:** In Texas, if I were to block it.

**Riley:** I was in Texas. I don't remember seeing a monument to you down there.

**Chrétien:** No, because I did not block it and I said to him, "Mr. Perot, a monument for me is not very useful in Texas because nobody votes for me there."

**Riley:** Were there other trade issues that became—

**Chrétien:** We had problems, fish problems on the west coast, and it was one element where he agreed I was right, but he said, "I have no power." The state is involved, the natives are involved, and you know, like we are sometimes, dealing with the provinces and problems of that nature. So we could understand each other on these things. We never had any argument, Bill and I. He never abruptly canceled a meeting. It was always done in good gesture. He knew his file and I knew mine, so we didn't have to fight.

**Riley:** Did the Americans have a part at all? You mentioned fisheries, and there was this fascinating account in your book about the problems that you had with Spain at one point.

**Chrétien:** Yes, but America stayed out of it. In fact, Canada was very activist. Through my career, we had the three miles limit, went to a 12-mile limit, and up to a 200-mile limit. But the problem we have in Canada is we have a continental shelf that is very long—in Newfoundland, more than 200 miles—and we were stopping the fishing of cod on our side, but the Spaniards were coming to the same water, 210 miles, catching all the fish that we were not fishing. So I said, “That makes no bloody sense. If we stop for conservation, you will stop too.” And so you read about that in the book.

It was a complex thing for us, and of course all my advisors were telling me not to do it. You read that, about my Minister of Fisheries in Newfoundland, but I promised that I was to fix it, so I kept my word. I mentioned that in the book. I came home, it was Good Friday night, and my wife said—we had been traveling the west—she said, “We’ll have three days on the lake resting.” I said, “Perhaps, but perhaps not, because tomorrow, I’m starting a war against Spain.” She didn’t sleep, and so I watched and was kept informed. We pushed back the ships and we arrested the ships, and we eventually managed to change the rule, but it was for conservation.

**Riley:** Right. But there was no American on this notice or anything of that nature.

**Chrétien:** No. I did not call him that much. There was an unfortunate incident that I mention in the book when I moved on the problem of Rwanda.

**Riley:** Yes. I wanted to hear about this.

**Chrétien:** And on this, I talked with Clinton. We solved the problem without solving the problem in a way. But I remember I talked with him at that time. I said, “We have to do something.” And he agreed.

**Riley:** Forgive me for interrupting, but if I could ask you specifically about Rwanda, because that’s an area where, in talking with the President’s foreign policy advisors, there is a real sense of disappointment over how that had unfolded. And in your book, you indicate that you had a sense of worry about Rwanda as the atrocities were unfolding. What were you seeing that the Americans weren’t seeing, and did you try to communicate to the Americans that there was a tragedy unfolding there?

**Chrétien:** You will find out. There is a book that has been written called *Roller Coaster*, by James Bartleman, who was my policy advisor. We talk about it. I remember talking with Bill and what I did that night—I remember that weekend. I was at the lake and it was pouring rain. It was in the fall, if I recall, and it was terrible, the weather, and I could not do anything and I was watching TV and said, “I have to do something, somebody has to do something.” And I got on the phone and I called Cardoso for example and I said, “We have to send troops there quickly.” Cardoso said, “No problem, Jean, I have some in Angola, tell me where to send them.” I talked with the Prime Minister of Belgium and he said, because Rwanda was a former colony, “We can’t send planes, but we will help the—” I said, “OK, but can we use your plane to take some soldiers from Senegal or Côte d’Ivoire to go there, and that type of work?” I talked to the Prime Minister of Great Britain. They were all wanting to do something.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** When that news got there—I don't remember exactly. You will know better from reading the books. That created a shift of position there and a lot of the Rwanda people came back in Rwanda from what was Zaire in those days I guess, or the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the problem was somewhat solved, so the troops didn't have to go. The Americans, for the first time, had accepted to go there under the leadership of a Canadian general. That was very unprecedented for the Americans, and Bill had agreed to that. Of course probably the Americans don't want to talk too much about it, because it was something done over the weekend.

Now the shift occurred, there was a change in the population, and after that we tried to—the bureaucrats got mixed up during that. We had a meeting and after that, there was virtually no need to have it in the same forum. It had resolved without us going there. But what we have done to help has created the movement there, when they saw that they were to be confronted with something serious, a shift of position on both sides, perhaps some more killing, I don't know. The Rwanda people came back. They knew they could come back into Rwanda, whoever it was, the group that came back, so the crisis disappeared. But for me, that weekend was very important. It showed to me that when sometimes you take an initiative, we're waiting too much on the Americans to move on it. And for them it's complicated. That was an example. For them to come in support on the initiative was somewhat unprecedented.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** And Bill agreed to that. But probably it was complicated after he had accepted, for probably the military did not like it very much, to have American soldiers under the command of a Canadian general. I don't know why there would be a problem, but it's the attitude of Americans sometimes that causes the problem.

**Riley:** Of course.

**Chrétien:** Why be the leader when you can be the number two and you have less responsibility? I don't know why. So that was a good experience for me, and Bill collaborated with me on that. I am not in a position to tell you. My Ambassadors involved with that will tell you more about it, if you have to know, because for us it was a big move, for you it was a marginal move.

**Riley:** Exactly. But you don't recall whether your sense in the early stages of Rwanda was that the Americans were missing signals.

**Chrétien:** Let me put it this way. We all missed something, no doubt about it, because we had a famous soldier, [Romeo] Dallaire, who made a lot of news out of it, and he had no soldiers and he could see the genocide under his eyes and so on. That was missed by the UN but by us too, and especially the fact that for us that was a UN operation. But if I recall, Dallaire, Superintendent at the UN, was another Canadian, and there is a disagreement between the two of them that I was not aware of. The guy at the UN was not working for me, he was working for the UN.

**Riley:** Of course, but I didn't know whether informally there might have been things that you would have been made aware of, because there were Canadians in central positions.



**Chrétien:** Not really. When I decided to move I was reading a bit about it, but the sense of urgency came in—

**Riley:** Of course, and this was much later.

**Chrétien:** That dates—it's later.

**Riley:** Of course. You also were at odds with the United States some over Bosnia.

**Chrétien:** Yes, because you were not sending soldiers there and you wanted to make all the decisions. I remember in January 1994 when they wanted to bombard the place where we were there. I used the phrase that the Americans will fight until the last Canadians—they had no soldiers, they just want to use planes, and we were on the ground. And so I fought hard not to have—my soldiers said, “Why don't you go and bombard where you have soldiers? I don't want you to shoot at my guys.”

**Riley:** Who are you dealing with?

**Chrétien:** Bill.

**Riley:** With Clinton.

**Chrétien:** But it was, remember, 1994. It was in January. It was my first meeting. I'd been elected in October. I'd been sworn in the first days of November. I will always remember, because my birthday is on the 11th of January, and I remember at that time my nephew went to Washington, was still the Ambassador in Belgium, so we had a nice dinner to celebrate my first birthday as Prime Minister, in a restaurant in Belgium, where the food is good.

**Riley:** Yes?

**Chrétien:** Oh, yes. Belgium has the best food.

**Riley:** So you were successful with Clinton on this, or not?

**Chrétien:** Well, eventually they did have—they were involved in the political element of it, with no soldiers on the ground. That was very frustrating.

**Riley:** Right. And you had indicated in the book at one point that you were frustrated because there were meetings of five or six nations.

**Chrétien:** But eventually they had a meeting and didn't notify me, and so the press would make comment, and we had reason not to be unhappy. They didn't invite me and I said, “They didn't want me to be responsible, fine. I'm not an egomaniac. If they don't want me fine, and they can run it without me, that's all right,” but the press gave me hell. And it was probably an oversight. It was a problem in Europe and I am in the—one of the problems of Canada, from abroad they think we're so close to the Americans, that they think they don't have to take care of us as well, and when it is a problem in Europe, the Germans wanted to be involved and they didn't have

soldiers either. There were all those guys who had no soldiers, and our soldiers were on the ground and they didn't invite me.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** And that is happening once in a while, and of course, if you're Prime Minister, the press likes to show to you that you're not there, how come? But it's like that all the time. They want you to tell the President of China what to do all the time.

**Riley:** Of course.

**Chrétien:** You read that in my book, when I said, "You don't want me to tell the Premier of Saskatchewan what to do, but you want me to tell the President of China what to do."

**Riley:** Well, the press is responsible for doing that in every country, right?

**Chrétien:** Of course. You know, I have never had a problem. I virtually never called a press guy myself. No. I will have my advisor—if they say that you're there and I'm not there, I will tell them, "You're wrong. I was not there." If they say I'm stupid, that's judgment. They can pass the judgment they want.

**Riley:** Yes.

**Chrétien:** I remember one day I said, "You wrote I'm stupid, fine. But I have to tell you sir, there are enough stupid people in Canada to elect a stupid man as Prime Minister." That was my answer. "And why don't you try to become Prime Minister? Good luck." That was always the easy answer to guys who are just the critics.

**Riley:** Away from the press and back to a specific issue. I'd asked about Bosnia and there was an internal debate within the United States about lifting the arms embargo on the Muslims there that Canada had opposed, and I'm wondering if you have any recollections.

**Chrétien:** No. We had defended the Canadian position that was we were opposed to lifting the embargo. We tend to be against armament here, all the time.

**Riley:** Americans are not that way.

**Chrétien:** No. We're different that way. I think that if you want my views, they use much too much of defense. The problems we're having, you use it for health care. Pax Americana, I always thought it was a mistake. This theory they tried to sell to Clinton that George W. bought, and that was a disaster for Bush. He bought that. There was a guy who was a promoter of that, became the— [Donald] Rumsfeld and all that gang.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** That led to the trouble that you got into.

**Riley:** NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] expansion, was that something that was problematic for you?

**Chrétien:** NATO [*laughs*]. NATO, you saw the incident between [Jacques] Chirac and Bill Clinton and I that was in the book.

**Riley:** Yes.

**Chrétien:** When we were with the Prime Minister of Spain the night before, I saw Chirac in the corner with Bill and Hillary, and I could see that there was kind of an argumentation there. Bill called me and said, “Jean, Chirac is very difficult. Can you help me?” He used more colorful words, as I recall, and I said, “Let me look into that.” So during the night I proposed a solution that was not a solution, but how many should we take into NATO right away? I wanted to take more, as I had said at the NATO meeting before in January of ‘94. My argument was that we promised to them that democracy will take them in, so we have to deliver. And the argument is, “But Yeltsin will be mad.” I said, “Yes, he will be mad about anything we do anyway, so we might as well swallow them with one shot.”

But Bill did not want to do that, and there were some countries where we wanted them there—and Chirac too. We agreed not to have the Baltic, but if I recall, we wanted to have three more or four more. One was Slovenia, one was Romania, and whatever it is, that the Americans did not want right away, and Chirac wanted them right away. Chirac was in a difficult position because he had just lost his government, the Prime Minister had been defeated, because he was the President but the opposition forming their governments, so he was very uncomfortable and he had the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was not a friend of his. He was not a partner, same political party.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** So we had some political problems and he opposed. Anyway, I remember I offered—I use it quite often you know, to break the ice. I would say, “Oh, the problem is the English text and the French text are not the same.” They were exactly the same, but you know, saving face is very important. So I made a solution now for something in the morning, which was let’s postpone, and we will start with the northern part of that, then the eastern part, then the southern part. After that, when I looked on the map, it was more east and west and north and south, whatever. But they had to save face. So in the morning I made the presentation and Clinton said, “Let’s write the communiqué with the secretary of NATO, and we can talk about something else.” So during lunchtime, my Minister of Foreign Affairs was worried about the text that was face saving for both.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** More for Chirac.

**Riley:** I see.

**Chrétien:** Because he had been strong. I don’t know if it’s in my book, but Bill said to my staff that Jean is a really clever legislator. I don’t know if I wrote it. He made a great compliment to

Bruce Hartley and others, who were talking that I saved the day for them, and Chirac, in the morning after, Jean Pelletier was my senior staff, he used to be the mayor of Quebec City when Chirac was the mayor of Paris, and they had an Association of Francophone mayors, and Chirac was the president and Pelletier was his buddy, was the secretary, so they knew each other very well. They had a breakfast in the morning and Chirac said to Pelletier, “Your friend, Chrétien, you know I painted myself in a corner and Jean took me out of there,” type of comment. Well, sometimes I did that under Bush.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** My sense of humor and the fact that I’m not a big shot there helped me. Another thing that I was very careful, never get out and brag about it. If you take too much credit—we’re a bunch of guys who necessarily were very visible, and we cannot give the credit to all of us all the time, or you’re seen by your own electorate as weak. So they have to take credit for any success, and even if sometimes they were latecomers, if it was a successful solution, it is the resolution of everybody.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** And if you say, “I did that,” people don’t like it, and some used to do that too much. For me, as I was not doing that too much, that led to the comment of Tony Blair in my book. He says aloud what we think and don’t have the guts to say it. But to do that, you need to not care too much, worry too much about how you look. For me, I was happy to be Prime Minister. I was in a job that was the best, and if I don’t have all the credit, that’s fine, and there’s a good chance I will not have all the blame that I deserve, too. *[laughter]*

**Riley:** Exactly. Terrorism, was that something that was a concern?

**Chrétien:** Let me put it this way, it was not a big issue in those days. We would discuss that probably, but it was never at the top of the agenda. It arrived after Bill, and I would say that it was not a daily preoccupation. It was not something that was coming out in discussion very much, if at all.

**Riley:** One thing that you don’t talk about, as I recall, in the book whatsoever is the difficulties that President Clinton had in 1998 and whether you had conversations with him after the news broke about his relationship.

**Chrétien:** But I talked with him. Sometimes they referred to his friends here, referred to me one time and another time he did not, but I called him a few times to encourage him and he said, “Do your job and forget about that nonsense.” Here in Canada we are not voyeurs like you are in the United States, and they are worse in Great Britain. Here in Canada, the private life of a politician here is not exposed very much.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** Sometimes we hear that one guy had a divorce and so on, but nobody asks why. It’s private life and as long as it’s not affecting the public life, we tend to ignore it.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** It's more civilized.

**Riley:** Did you find that President Clinton's demeanor was altered as a result of this?

**Chrétien:** No. In his handling of the problems, he was the same. We knew that he was facing difficult times and so on, but as far as I was concerned, business as usual was prevalent. Is that the right word in English, prevalent?

**Riley:** Prevalent, yes.

**Chrétien:** It's a French word but you use it in English. Prevalent?

**Riley:** Yes.

**Chrétien:** You use it in English.

**Riley:** Yes, prevalent, yes exactly. Did you have a relationship with Al Gore at all?

**Chrétien:** Yes. I met him on the fish problem, when he came to see me here, and it was always good relation. I have a great photo. I told him a joke where—you know, Gore was not laughing a lot. He was a very serious guy, and I got him to laugh so much. Where is that picture? My God, you've never seen Al Gore laughing that much.

**Riley:** Yes. That might have been to his advantage if you'd had that picture—

**Chrétien:** I said to somebody, "I should send him this picture to put in his ads."

**Riley:** It's true.

**Chrétien:** But it was a bit of a story that was salted a bit. I was telling him that I could not speak English, that it's not for publication, and I was making mistakes. So one day, I was hanging out alone with some MPs [military police], who were Anglo, and I could not speak English, but it was my way to learn, and I was picking up a bit of English. I had a notion but I could not speak publicly, anything like that, and I had problems to express myself.

So one day they asked me something about my election, and I worked very hard, I said, because I had won a district that was impossible to win. I was on the street. The previous election had been won by a big majority. Before it was my party, but we had lost. So I worked very hard, I went to all the stores and all of the factories, and I would shake hands with every man and every woman who worked there and sometimes, when they were coming out of the factories in great numbers, I had not the time to shake their hands—the quote is there—so "I will just touch them on the *bras*." So you laugh, so you can see my hand is on the *bras* here and he has his mouth open, because *bras* is that and for me it's arm rather than *bra*. So that was the joke I was telling him. We were outside and the photographer took a fantastic picture and I said he should have put it in the front, because it was one of his problems.

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** He's not relaxed enough. And he was very good friends with my nephew, the Ambassador.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** Raymond was six or seven years there and he had a good personality, you know he was speaking aloud and taking him a lot of places, but was seen as—he's still a commentator all the time on TV, on foreign affairs, in French or in English, but he was my nephew and that was a controversy. "Oh, my God, it is nepotism," you know, but he was a professional. He had been Ambassador in Zaire, had been Ambassador to Mexico before, had been Ambassador, named by the conservative government. He was professional and a very good man. So I said, "I'm sending my nephew there. It's a good thing." Anyway, he called the White House. They wanted to know which one is coming. And because of the fact that he was my nephew and everybody knew that he can talk to me all the time, I gave him a lot of facilities. Of course this guy is close to the Prime Minister.

**Riley:** And were you getting reports back from your nephew about—

**Chrétien:** Well, he's my nephew. He wouldn't send reports to the bureaucrats, but, "I'll call Uncle Jean," and we would chat on the phone. And I'm sure that this was helping him a lot in the United States.

**Riley:** Right. But was it helping you as Prime Minister?

**Chrétien:** Of course. If you talk with him, he has a story, telling him that he has one hundred files of controversies when he arrived, and he finished with six. But I don't have the precise figures.

**Riley:** Of course.

**Chrétien:** We had a few problems, because you cannot have more than \$1 billion of trade, not having any problems, but it was very smooth. We never had any problem on trade between us and the United States. There was Cuba, but it was—I kept the policy we had and he never mentioned that to us. They have their laws. I have to call them a few times and Raymond to work, because of some interpretation of the law, and he tended to interpret the law of the administration as liberally as possible.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** Without offending too much the Congress or the Senate, Helms-Burton was involved.

**Riley:** But you were able to get reports from him about the internal dynamics within Washington.

**Chrétien:** Yes, of course, but Raymond, being my nephew, talking with Senators and Congressmen, and he used the Embassy to have all sorts of dinners, and so when I went to a few

of them, I could see that he was very comfortable and they were very comfortable with him. That must have been an advantage, the fact that he was my nephew.

**Riley:** Of course. Did the election results in 2000 worry you initially, to move from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party?

**Chrétien:** I was comfortable with Clinton and I knew Gore. I did not know the others. When you know somebody, you tend to be—but we know it is your election. What was funny is when that happened, I told you that meeting with Clinton around Christmas, he was telling me about what happened, and I will inquire about it, and that he was very knowledgeable about all the districts and why, this and that. It was very interesting because I'm watching. And ABC [American Broadcasting Company] had sent a report in Canada. I had my election, I think it was a few weeks, almost at the same time, or a few weeks after your election, while you were all having these court cases and so on.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** And the guy came on ABC, he came to Canada, you know it was my third election. And he said in Canada they do it the old way; still a piece of paper, it's all black with a little white spot and you put your X there, and they count them one-by-one and two hours after the closing of the polls we know who is Prime Minister. And here in Canada, there's one thing different, the election is two weeks from now and everybody knows that Chrétien will win. All the press considered that I was to win. It was no surprise at all. We have the same system and it's the best way. There's a great sense of democracy when you go with a piece of paper, you put it on the table. When I see those bloody slot machines, I don't like it. We will use it eventually. I don't like it.

**Riley:** Oh, they're even worse now. There are computer machines with little spin dials and push buttons, and you're never quite sure, when you hit the enter button, like on a computer, that the vote is—

**Chrétien:** That is just a gadget. The best way is a piece of paper, and you put it there and you take your pen. Not even your pen, the pen there, all the same color, and you put it in the box.

**Riley:** I'm with you.

**Chrétien:** And I don't know why they don't go back to that. It's easy.

**Riley:** Contracts. Contracts is the interest, I think.

**Chrétien:** I think it's all business. That is cheap, it costs nothing—you need a box, that is transparent now. One president of one country told me that I helped him to win the election. He had been elected President of Madagascar—that's the one, he's in trouble. He got pushed around lately. He said, "I became President because of you, Mr. Chrétien. You helped us in our election. You gave us transparent boxes so nobody could stuff them." And he said, "It's why I'm President today." I don't know whether he—I didn't ask him. I didn't even know that he had done it that way. The people go and vote on a piece of paper and they see putting that in the box.

**Riley:** Exactly. You've been very generous with your time, but I'm wondering about—

**Chrétien:** Yes. I have some work to do too, apparently.

**Riley:** I'm wondering if I could ask you about the transition into the next President. If you could give us a comparison of your sense about these two leaders, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

**Chrétien:** No, I won't do that. I don't like to do that. It is about Clinton. I don't want to say Clinton versus the other guy. That is inappropriate. A lot of difference. We disagree on the war and so on, but personal—the press wrote that I had very bad relations with him. It's not true.

**Riley:** With President Bush.

**Chrétien:** Bush. The press wanted me to have bad relations and it was not personal, it was the policies. And he was very different in a way than Bill Clinton, because he had a firm position. He would come to a firm position, while Bill loved a seminar, he loves to discuss. George, I believe, was not like that. He would come with a position and if you disagree, you disagree, no big deal, that's it, fine, we don't agree, next. So it was personally not that difficult, but on policies, we had a huge difference on the war in Iraq, and I was involved in that, but it had never been bitterness between the two of us.

**Riley:** Of course, of course.

**Chrétien:** In fact, vis-à-vis me, I had told him my position early in the game. I said, "If you don't have UN, I will not be there, and to have UN, you need better proof of weapons of mass destruction." I said that to him in August and by that time, they had already decided there will be a war in March, and we worked hard at the UN. The decision was made in my mind, but I had told him, "If you don't have the UN, I will not be there." So one of his very close guys told me, he said, "Mr. Prime Minister, I told him." And I said, "Are your guys mad at me?" He said no. He said, "We did not believe you, but at least you did not double-cross us, you told us." Some others double-crossed them, so I was not there, and they knew that from the first day. But they felt that being a good politician that I was to end up with them anyway. He said, "We misread you." He said, "It's our fault, not yours."

**Riley:** I don't want to go too far down this, because that's another project, although I'm beginning on that too and I may have to come back and talk with you about that, but did that color virtually everything that the Americans did with you from that point forward?

**Chrétien:** The media wanted me to have bad relations with Bush, and the Canadian media even more, because Bush was a so-called right-winger, a right-winger against me. Chrétien, Bush cannot stand him. It was not true. He was very pleasant with me all the time, and in fact he had every reason to be pleasant with me, because when we would go have these meetings, I can talk, chitchat. I know about your football more than you guys. I know all the quarterbacks of all the teams, and so I could talk baseball, I could talk football with him. He was into baseball and I told him that the Texas Rangers were paying Hector Rodriguez—?

**Riley:** Alex Rodriguez.



**Chrétien:** Alex Rodriguez. \$250 million for ten years? I said, “My God, to hit the ball and throw it to the first base?” I said, “You will have to be President of the United States 400 years to make that same amount of money.” So that way there was no problem. My wife was closer to Hillary Clinton, but in a different way, and my wife is less political than Hillary Clinton, but quite knowledgeable, and at every international meeting then would be Hillary and Aline [Chrétien], good friends. Aline is a shy person, would not seek her. I think she’s doing a good job now, but I don’t talk with her. I talk with Bill once in a while but less regularly now because he has his own life, I have mine. We’re supposed to play golf. But he was a good guy, I like him very much, and I think he’s a friend of mine.

**Riley:** Sure, of course. Is there anything that I’m missing? You might have two or three wonderful stories that you didn’t commit to the book. Did you play cards with him ever?

**Chrétien:** No.

**Riley:** Just golf was pretty much—

**Chrétien:** No me, I’m going to bed early.

**Riley:** You go to bed early.

**Chrétien:** Oh, yes.

**Riley:** And Clinton did not go to bed early.

**Chrétien:** But I’m told he was sleeping five hours.

**Riley:** That’s what I’ve been told as well.

**Chrétien:** So I don’t know. No, we never had a social life together.

**Riley:** Exactly. Other than the golf game, which was an occasional golf game.

**Chrétien:** Yes. If we were in the Capital, we will not go and have a beer together or that type of thing. I was not like that. I did that with nobody. I tend to go back home.

**Riley:** With your wife.

**Chrétien:** Yes. I’ve been married to the same girl 52 years and I always felt myself that I needed to be rested, and discussions about how to handle myself with Mr. Trudeau. And we have a residence here, that is our Camp David, but it’s not used the same way. It’s a nice lake about 20 minutes from here. We’re alone at the lake and Trudeau said, “Go there, Jean, be quiet, think. Your problem is too many guys like us we’re too active,” and it was very good advice.

**Riley:** That is a difference between you and Clinton, I think. Clinton, you got the sense he did not much like to be alone.

**Chrétien:** Probably not.

**Riley:** I mean I don't know that.

**Chrétien:** I don't know his private life very much. I don't know how he was with his wife and so on, but he seems to have people around him all the time. I have a brother who is like that. I'm not like that. I did everything politically, that was all right, but when politics was finished—

**Riley:** Of course.

**Chrétien:** When I was a politician, I was in Toronto. I never slept in Toronto. I would always drive home and sleep there for the kids to know that that was home, and the same thing for Montreal. I would leave Montreal at 1:00, driving, arrive at 3:00 in the morning, 4:00, no big deal. I would be home.

**Riley:** I'm spending one night on the road and then I'll be back with my family, too, for pretty much the same reason. Were there any missed opportunities between the United States and Canada during your time? Do you look back and say—

**Chrétien:** Well, the land mine treaty.

**Riley:** The land mine treaty, but that wouldn't—I mean that got worse obviously, after Clinton had left office. I don't know whether Al Gore would have been any more amenable to doing that or not.

**Chrétien:** I don't know. I think that it is—you know, when I had a discussion with Yeltsin, you know Yeltsin had lost his fingers?

**Riley:** No.

**Chrétien:** He had lost his fingers and a part of his hand. I don't know from where, I never asked him. I remember when I moved, all his advisors did not want him to sign, and I said, "Boris, if we're crazy enough to have war, that's fine, but when it's over, is it responsible to leave mines in the fields that young girls and young boys will walk on, jump in the air, perhaps be killed, losing a leg, an arm, or losing fingers because they were playing with that?"

**Riley:** Sure.

**Chrétien:** And he told me, "You're right, but these guys don't want me to sign. If I can keep some to protect the land—" What I wanted them to do is you put your mines within a fence, because he said, "We need them to protect us against the nuclear electricity, nuclear reactor."

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** "We have to protect them, and if you have terrorism—" and so and so, and I said, "You do it. As long as everybody knows where they are and it was permissible under the treaty, that you have made it permissible." And he said, "I will sign if Clinton signs." So I put a lot of pressure on Bill on that one. I remember one night we were on the phone all night and in the morning he said, "I cannot sign." So we proceeded and we have now 145 countries that have signed. We put money to de-mine some areas and so on, but I think we came close.

**Riley:** Will the current President help?

**Chrétien:** I'm out of it.

**Riley:** I see. Mr. Chrétien, thank you so much for taking this time. It's been fun for me. We're creating a large archive of these recollections so that people 30, 40 years from now can come—

**Chrétien:** You do that for whom, for the university?

**Riley:** We do it for the university.

**Chrétien:** Which university?

**Riley:** The University of Virginia. We've done these interviews on President [Jimmy] Carter, Reagan.

**Chrétien:** So you go to how many former colleagues you will meet, as many as possible?

**Riley:** In Clinton's case, this has been the biggest project so far.

**Chrétien:** How many?

**Riley:** We've interviewed about 130 total.

**Chrétien:** Really?

**Riley:** Yes. Almost all of the senior Cabinet officers, the senior White House officials.

**Chrétien:** What about foreign leaders?

**Riley:** Important deputies. The Clinton project is the first time that we've done any interviews with foreign leaders.

**Chrétien:** So you have Cardoso, myself.

**Riley:** Cardoso, Havel, Kim Dae-jung in South Korea before he passed away, and you, and there are still—I'm talking with Tony Blair's office now about arranging a date for that. We're still talking with [Olusegun] Obasanjo about doing an interview with him, from Nigeria.

**Chrétien:** Obasanjo.

**Riley:** Obasanjo.

**Chrétien:** He's a good friend of mine.

**Riley:** Oh, is that right? Well maybe I should—

**Chrétien:** And [Helmut] Kohl?

**Riley:** Kohl has been in ill health, and when I was in Europe last year to do Havel, I had hoped to do Kohl. We're pressing to try to finish the Clinton interviews by April, because then we'll begin the project on George W. Bush, and hope to have everything finished on Clinton before then. If Kohl is amenable, I'll try to go back to Germany and do that interview with him.

**Chrétien:** Are you a teacher or are you just doing that now?

**Riley:** I do this, although I do get to teach a class on the Presidency to undergraduates once a year, and I'll do that in the spring, but this is pretty much my job.

**Chrétien:** How many days?

**Riley:** Two days a week for that.

**Chrétien:** For how many months?

**Riley:** Five or six months.

**Chrétien:** The teaching.

**Riley:** The teaching. It's complicated, because it limits the amount of time I can be on the road. We do about half of our interviews in Charlottesville and about 25 percent in Washington, which is only two and a half hours away, and then the other 25 percent involves travel. This was actually fairly easy, because the flight from Washington, as you know, is only an hour and a half.

**Chrétien:** Charlottesville is where?

**Riley:** Charlottesville is a two-hour drive from Dulles Airport.

**Chrétien:** So you drove to Dulles?

**Riley:** I drove to Dulles.

**Chrétien:** Got on the plane and you will go back home tonight.

**Riley:** Exactly. So I left my home yesterday morning at 7:30 and by 3:00 in the afternoon I was checking in the hotel here, so it was a pretty easy trip. It gets more complicated. The trip to Prague was complicated.

**Chrétien:** Which hotel were you at here?

**Riley:** I'm at the Fairmont.

**Chrétien:** Le Chateau Laurier?

**Riley:** Yes, exactly, it's very nice, thank you. Bruce recommended it.

**Chrétien:** It's very old. It is named after the first Francophone Prime Minister.

**Riley:** This is your, not mentor but your—

**Chrétien:** We had been four French Prime Ministers, but [Wilfrid] Laurier and I were pure laine. Trudeau's mother was Scottish and Louis St. Laurent's mother was Irish, and for me and Laurier, we were pure laine, all French. The French arrived here a long time ago, 1534, and so my ancestors are in North America before your ancestors. They arrived in 1660 from two areas, the Loire, with all the castles there. So we're from there and we had been in North America.

Oh yes, one recollection about Bill Clinton, and I don't know if I put it in my book. Did I mention the last lunch that we had with [François] Mitterrand in Italy, in 1994?

**Riley:** I don't think so.

**Chrétien:** All right. It was the first G-7 [Group of 7], there was no G-8 at that time. Mitterrand, it was his 14th G-7, that was his last, and the year after, it was to be the new president. So we had a lunch for him and we started to talk about—history is always a subject that would come to surface when we want to have an interesting discussion.

**Riley:** Yes.

**Chrétien:** And I advanced this theory that if we, the French Canadians of the day, had joined the American Revolution, most probably the language of the United States today would be French, because [John] Adams and [Thomas] Jefferson had been Ambassador to Paris for a long time. In fact, the [Sally] Hemings family, the second family of Jefferson, you know he had the kids with the black girl, they were communicating between them and each other in French.

**Riley:** Is that right?

**Chrétien:** Yes. And so the rest of the household did not know what is going on. And so what would be Canada, what would be United States? Canada would not exist, because if we are joined, Canada would have disappeared.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** That's my view, and French would be the language of America, because I'm told that there was a vote on that, because you split from England. So some people thought perhaps we should have a different language. I'm told that they made a vote between French, English, and German. I don't know if it's true. You're in history, you must know.

**Riley:** It sounds vaguely familiar, but I don't know the specifics.

**Chrétien:** And I said if the French—and you could see Mitterrand enjoying the thought of being the President of all of that. And Bill Clinton said something very nice. He said, "Jean, if that had happened, I would be here to be taking notes for you." He could be great like that.

**Riley:** Exactly.

**Chrétien:** That is true. The reason why we did not join is because we were more Catholic than French. You know that [Benjamin] Franklin spent a year in Montreal.

**Riley:** Oh no, I did not know that.

**Chrétien:** And the newspaper in Montreal, like I said, was founded by Franklin.

**Riley:** I did not know that.

**Chrétien:** They tried to persuade us to join the American Revolution and we did not join because the Brits offered us more guarantee for our Catholic religion than the Americans could give to us.

**Riley:** Did you ever talk religion with Clinton?

**Chrétien:** Not much. I don't talk religion much in public. For me, I'm very—I never use God in my speeches. I did it once and my wife said, "Don't do it again." I'm a Catholic but I never use religion. I'm very strong on that, because I have to vote against my push by my bishops, on abortion, on gay marriage. My God, the Bishop of Calgary said I was to go to hell and my wife said, "I'm going with you."

**Riley:** And the Clintons didn't probe you about those topics also?

**Chrétien:** Well, they would ask me questions about how I would manage to be pro-abortion. Not pro-abortion but pro-choice, for the woman to decide.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** My line was I have my own religious limits and I don't want to impose them on anybody else and I don't want anybody else to impose his on me. I'm very strong on individual civil rights.

**Riley:** Right.

**Chrétien:** And so they would ask me how I managed to be there, how I managed to be for capital punishment, gun control. I recall discussing that either with her or with him about the type of social problems that are difficult in the United States, Medicare, that we had here. So I had many discussions with him and with her on that. Not long, but I know about the subject and I have my solution, just do it, God damn it, that's it. That's the problem, they don't—I watch your medical problem, just making enough cooked cake; either you do it or you don't do it. It's tough. And that my—the problem will not be resolved, and it's doable, you do it. Sometimes my candor hurts me. I was at a hotel one day in Florida not long ago. It was a big hotel and there was a convention of guys in the medical system. Somebody asked me if I was with them and I said, "You guys, you're all in conflict of interest because you know that if 50 percent of the cost is eliminated, you will have to find jobs elsewhere." My God, the guy did not—some laughed, but one guy was really pissed off, probably I told him the truth. I don't want that to be in—

**Riley:** No, no, we'll clear that.

**Chrétien:** It is the problem. You go all the way.

**Riley:** But that was not something—

**Chrétien:** But the problem is your system is—it's why your system is less good than ours. You cannot do the things you have to do because of the so-called lobby. Lobbyists, this is a profession that should be banned, it's a waste of money. A bunch of pretenders of knowing create the impression that they're greasing the wheels all the time and so on, and it makes the politicians look bad. Yesterday they reveal that the banks spend \$23 million lobbying Washington on the regulation. I never received one lobbyist in my office.

**Riley:** No kidding? Is there not a comparable profession?

**Chrétien:** My view is it should be done by lawyers who have a profession with rules and where you can be suspended. I blame the bar. Who is a lobbyist? It's somebody who pretends he is a lobbyist, if you declare yourself a lobbyist.

**Riley:** This is true, there aren't any standards.

**Chrétien:** And very often it's a way to make a living for people who cannot do anything else, who use their so-called connections, who are sometimes completely—you know, the problem of anybody in public life is everybody pretends he's your friend. And if you shook hands with a guy three times and he says I know him, you cannot say I don't know him. But is he a friend? I have thousands of friends and I have no friends. Nobody is a friend anymore. You know?

**Riley:** That's a real problem for a politician.

**Chrétien:** Guys see. I had all these problems though, who has connection with Chrétien, and if a guy has worked for you in Montreal or Toronto or Vancouver, and you met him ten times, you're not to say he's my enemy, he's my friend. But that does not mean that you will cheat the taxpayers because, and the problem is that it is the political class who looks corrupt, and most of the corruption that there is, is underneath. They call defense contractors and all the money on this and that and so on. It's not the politician who pockets the money. Very few politicians get rich off politics, and it's not that they are that honest. It's very dangerous, too many people watching. If you change your standard of living too much they say, "What's going on?" Everybody watches, especially with the number of press people. There's 400 here watching me day in, day out. Imagine it was before 20,000 in journalism in Washington? I don't know. And everybody wants to get his little story that would push him up the ladder. The Deep Throat sentiment.

**Riley:** That certainly changed Washington.

**Chrétien:** Of course. And most of the politicians, they are not there to make money. They are the ego-driven type. For me, my father wanted me to be a politician. I wanted to be an architect. Dad wanted to have a son who was a politician and he said, "You're going to law school, you're not going into architecture." My God, he was right, because he said, "You will never be elected as an architect." He loves politics and he wanted one of his sons to be a politician, and he decided I was going to be the politician of the family. So I like to talk about these things when I get going.

**Riley:** I appreciate your—

**Chrétien:** And the good part of it is my partner thinks I'm working.

**Riley:** Oh, is that right? *[laughs]*

**Chrétien:** The door is closed.

**Riley:** I see.

**Chrétien:** He's always working. He spent two hours on what he was doing, but it was very serious.

**Riley:** Well thank you very much. I appreciate it.

**Chrétien:** I gave you a lot.

**Riley:** You have given us a lot, and it's enormously helpful to have this.

**Chrétien:** I hope I was humble enough. When you asked to talk about me, I would like to talk about somebody else.

**Riley:** The book itself was such a—

**Chrétien:** A good read?

**Riley:** Yes, a good read. It's interesting and well done.

**Chrétien:** I dictated the book.

**Riley:** No kidding?

**Chrétien:** Oh yes, because the style is Chrétien English, you see. I never learned English in my life, I never studied English.

**Riley:** No kidding?

**Chrétien:** A little bit.