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BEATRICE BISHOP BERLE

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi
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INTERVIEW

Q: This is Jewell Fenzi on September 9, 1989. I am talking with Beatrice Berle and her daughter Beatrice Meyerson at my home.

Why don't you just briefly fill me in on how you and your husband happened to come to Washington, and what year.

BERLE: Well, Adolf Berle was a member of the original Brain Trust in 1932, before Roosevelt was nominated; and he was called in by Sam Rosenman, who was a partner and special friend of Roosevelt's and who collected various people, including Raymond Moley and Adolf Berle and Rexford Tugwell as members of the original Brain Trust. After Roosevelt was elected, Adolf became financial adviser to the Federal Reserve headed by Jesse Jones.

Then people wanted Adolf to come to the State Department. In 1938 he came to the State Department. He was a man who usually had great vision of world events but he said "Oh, I'll be home soon, there's not going to be anything --" Of course, there was, so in the summer of 1939 we moved to Washington, only for the summer, we thought. We lived in

"Woodley," the residence of Henry Stimson at 3000 Cathedral Ave., NW. We did not have a lease, rather, an arrangement. Adolf said, "It won't be for long but if you insist on spending the summer in Washington, let's have a nice house. Stimson will let us rent the house for not very much on the condition that when or if he should be called back into government, we'll have to move. When I want to get out of it, I'll move Sssstt!" (making short whistling sound) Of course Stimson did get called back [as Secretary of War], which was least expected, and we had to move. I don't know if his place on Cathedral Avenue still exists.

Q: Oh yes, I think it is -- the Maret School. So you lived there that summer. Where was Stimson at that time?

BERLE: He was in New York in his law office. So, he became, unexpectedly, Secretary of War. We continued living here, in various places.

Q: I just want a bit of background on what brought you here. I remembered your telling of your interesting living arrangements. Did you immediately assume a public role when you came to Washington, supporting your husband in his State Department entertaining and --

BERLE: No.

Q: -- because you yourself were a doctor.

BERLE: Yes, I am a retired physician now. Eventually Adolf and I were stuck with a great deal of entertaining because Mr. [Cordell] Hull [Cordell Hull was Franklin D. Roosevelt's Secretary of State, 1933-44] didn't entertain. He lived at the Wardman Park Hotel. Sumner [Welles] [Sumner Welles, a career diplomat, was Under Secretary of State 1937-43] lived out at Oxon Hill, Maryland, so he entertained the "fancy" people out there, and did it very grandly. So we were the ones who were left with "other people" (she laughs) so we eventually had to do a great deal of entertaining. After the Stimson house we lived at Single Oak (2900 Cathedral Ave., NW) for one year; it's now the Swiss Embassy. Eventually we lived at 4000 Nebraska Avenue, which is now the site of the Japanese Embassy. The house we lived in was torn down.

There were tennis courts at Woodley when we lived there, and a croquet court at the bottom of the hill. Henry Wallace [Secretary of Agriculture] was among the prominent New Dealers who came to play tennis; Mr. Hull played croquet. At one point there was a scientific congress which the White House was supposed to "do" but didn't, and they asked us to do it and advanced money. That resulted, at Woodley, in a party to end all parties because we danced on the tennis courts. And one of my recollections is Albert Einstein walking down the long slope in front. That night I also learned never to wear a ring on my right hand when standing in a receiving line and shaking hands with a thousand people. It hurts!

Another of my notable memories is of a dinner party on a snowy night at Single Oak. Henrik Kauffmann, then Danish Ambassador to Washington, came in early in his dinner jacket and asked if he could borrow our skis. I remember him slipping into the skis and sailing down the hill. That house had the best sledding hill in Washington.

When Hull played croquet, the young, that is to say my children, were supposed to be not seen and not heard. My daughters, Beatrice and Alice, climbed a tree one afternoon while the game was in progress. Beatrice sat on a branch where yellow jackets had nested. OH OUCH! she cried out; and screamed and screamed. Which therefore made her a "heard." Finally she jumped out of the tree -- after being stung about eight times -- and after I plastered her with bicarbonate of soda, we walked down to the tennis court to apologize to Mr. Hull for messing up the game, and also to show, I guess, that we weren't into torturing children at the Berles' house.

Hull played croquet every single day, at 5 o'clock, I think it was, with three picked people at the State Department. He would designate whom he wanted to play with. The best player was Stanley Hornbeck [Stanley Hornbeck was a Far East advisor, and in 1944 ambassador to The Netherlands.] another was Jimmy [James Clement] Dunn [James C. Dunn was Assistant Secretary of State 1944-46; Ambassador to Italy, France, Spain and Brazil 1946-56.] -- the only people who ever beat him. Stanley Hornbeck had a large abdomen. The children would sit at the bottom of the hill and watch him. Most people shoot croquet sort of sideways, a few would shoot between their legs. Stanley Hornbeck was fascinating when he leaned down, you could see the tummy coming in between his legs. They (the children) had a worm's eye view.

Hull always picked the weakest player to be his partner. And he always used a red ball. He would go around the whole course in one turn, because of course when you go through a wicket you get a free shot, and he kept going the whole way around. Before hitting the final stake, he would usually with his free shot go back, get his partner's ball, and hit it through all the wickets, you see. (Fenzi gasps) It didn't always end that quickly; but he was almost never beaten except by Hornbeck and Jimmy Dunn. I can't recall who it was who always said, "I'll have the yaller ball," which surprised my children who didn't think it was yaller at all, it was orange. Adolf seldom seemed to have the time to play, and when he did, since he wasn't very good, he was always Hull's partner.

Q: So you had Cordell Hull almost every afternoon for croquet and your children had to be very quiet between, what, five and seven?

BERLE: I don't remember exactly. But I bought a wicker cart, which I still have, to wheel down with cold drinks for the players. Summer in Washington, and no air-conditioning then.

To return to our entertaining at "Woodley," Whitaker Chambers [In September, 1939, Whitaker Chambers, an avowed Communist courier, accused Alger Hiss of transmitting

confidential government documents to the Soviets.] came around to see Adolf. Then he wrote his book, saying that I was asleep in the next room during his visit, which was not so. Adolf was much distressed and annoyed because he thought Chambers had Communist connections, and it disturbed him that Chambers was all the time talking about [Alger] Hiss [Alger Hiss entered the Department of State in 1936 and rose rapidly to become an adviser at various international conferences and a coordinator of American foreign policy.], and the question was, what were Hiss's connections. The whole Hiss episode started, sort of, there. Chambers told Adolf about Hiss, yes. Larry Duggan [Laurence (Larry) Duggan, adviser on political relations at the State Department and later Chief of the Latin American Relations division.] was the son of Stephen Duggan, who was one of the sort of great educators of my generation. Larry was in the Foreign Service. Chambers implicated him, saying he was one of the -- his wife was considered to have Left leanings; and there was a big question as to whether Duggan was pushed out of the window, fell out, or jumped out. Eventually they must have decided he fell out because she received his life insurance.

Q: This is not really far afield, because it's filling in the background against which you were functioning at the State Department. At that time had you gone back to school and gotten your medical degree?

BERLE: Oh yes, yes. When we first came to Washington, I had a kind of residency at Gallinger Hospital, now DC General. Trying to go to diplomatic dinner parties and staying up all night was not always very "effective." By the time we'd got to Nebraska Avenue, we were entertaining high-ranking people. One whom I remember especially, because I thought he was so arrogant, was Pardo, of the distinguished aristocratic Peruvian family. On one occasion when he came and the streets were full of motorcycle escorts, he proudly told my son Peter, who was about seven years old, "Now you'll always remember that the Peruvian Ambassador came to see your parents and had a motorcycle escort!"

Q: (during laughter) I think we call that diplomatitis, don't we? Well, you were doing your medical internship, had three children, were running a household -- I assume you had good and adequate help -- and playing the role of spouse of a high-ranking State Department official; all at the same time.

BERLE: During our first few years we had a German couple and Bessie as laundress and a nurse Ruth Hagen (Hagie) to take care of the children. By 1938-39 the couple, Frieda and Hermann Schlageter, were still with us and so was Hagie. Bessie was a black woman who had been with Stimson at Woodley and came over to Single Oak with us because she said we knew how to treat "colored people"; she for us was like anybody else, so she was very happy with us.

Q: I'm interested in how you balanced being a resident in the hospital...

BERLE: Well, I had what was known as a resident fellowship, in which you did a certain amount of research and you did bear some work at night but not serving all night every night as residents normally do.

During the War, Adolf was in charge of Western Hemisphere Affairs, which included England, Iceland and also the overrun countries. Adolf and Henrik Kauffmann [Danish Ambassador to the US] re-invented Denmark after that country was overrun by the Nazis. (The U.S. continued to recognize a free Denmark which included Greenland and Iceland.) This is in all the history books, including a very good one written in Danish. Iceland became independent in 1944; Greenland remained a part of Denmark.

Q: Now that we've sketched in your Washington background, what I'm really eager to learn is how you lived abroad from day to day. Maybe we should skip ahead to Brazil, where I believe you took medical care of the Embassy staff didn't you, in Rio?

BERLE: In the course of the War, Dr. [Thomas] Parran was head [surgeon general] of U.S. Public Health Service. He had put syphilis on the map. Before his time, one didn't mention syphilis. I was made a Major in the Public Health Service at that point in Washington, about 1942. Dr. Parran got me to organize a health service for government employees and also for OWI [Office of War Information]. The latter was a real puzzle because all its personnel were supposed to be 4-F's [ineligible for military service]. At the same time they were supposed to be able to go into combat. That was quite a challenge. The OWI had a New York office also, and another director, with whom I had a dreadful time because she would say, "Well, these people are not fit." And I said, "All right, they're not fit, you say so. But the OWI has to decide they're not fit, and risk sending them anyway." I couldn't get over to her the idea that that was not her decision. Dr. Parran was a very interesting and lovely person. His wife was a good friend of Adolf's and helped him in an informal way in the State Department.

My children were very impressed when I was commissioned a Major. Then I went off to work every day but I had no uniform, not because they hadn't designed one but because I refused to wear one. I said, "I'm sitting in an office, I'm a doctor, I wear a white coat." I can't quite recall the name of the building downtown where I worked. I was supposed to take care of minor ailments, like in an outpatient department. You had to make a survey for tuberculosis. The War Production Board [WPB] and some of OWI [Office of War Information] were in the building. I remember one of the 4-F's very well: he had a large heart, I can still visualize his X-rays. I informed the proper officials of this; OWI were sending him for some sort of duty behind the lines in North Africa. He came back, very happy, having hunted lions or whatnot, and said, "You see, you told me I shouldn't go, and here I am. I didn't break down!"

My responsibility was to state the medical facts; OWI made the decision. For instance, they took a diabetic who was really ill, and he broke down on them, as expected, so they had to bring him back at great expense. The children, Adolf and I, in a carpool, would

leave 4000 Nebraska Avenue en famille. The State Department didn't give anyone, except Mr. Hull perhaps, a car or extra gas. Adolf had an A ration card for one of our cars, which entitled him to three gallons a week. Because I was an MD I had a C ration card, which allowed me considerably more. I drove, Adolf got in, Alice and Beatrice were obliged by Potomac School to arrive by 7:50 a.m., along with their brother, Peter. I dropped them off, then Adolf off, and I went down to Gallinger or just to the office building. By that time I was also on the teaching staff at Gallinger as well as working for the Public Health Service. We're speaking now of 1941 or 42. The children and Adolf took a bus or taxi home.

Q: When did you go to Brazil, when was Mr. Berle appointed Ambassador?

BERLE: This was in November 1944. Adolf was chairman of the International Air Conference. It was a terrible time. He was trying to get a universal code for free air, analogous to freedom of the seas, and was getting very little support from Washington. The British and Pan Am were 100% trying to hold onto it for themselves, they didn't want everybody else. But Adolf finally succeeded in getting the freedom of the air. By this time [Edward] Stettinius [Edward R. Stettinius, Jr. was Secretary of State from December 1944 to June 1945.], who certainly was not the brightest man in the world, had become Secretary of State. The President was sick, so Adolf was left holding the bag with nobody to support him, and he felt really definitely betrayed, and I think he was. At the last minute, somehow, out of Warm Springs [Georgia] came a telegram from President Roosevelt approving the treaty as achieved, and offering Adolf the Embassy in Brazil.

By now Adolf was thoroughly disgusted and didn't want to do anything of the sort. But we told him that we all loved Brazil. While in Washington we had made very close friends with the then Brazilian Ambassador, Cados Martins and Maria, a wild woman sculptor. That's how we went to Brazil and continued, ever after, happy with Brazilians. By now we're in January 1945. I took a plane, and Peter and Hagie with me, the two girls stayed in Washington to finish school. We were on a B-17, one of the heavy bombers. The Post Report explained that the Ambassador in that huge palace had to have his own sheets, silver, etc. I bought sheets for us and all the staff -- there were at least ten of them -- and a hotel set of silver, but I probably took some of my own too because the dining table seated 60, 28 on each side. We took [the Department of State] gold [rimmed] china, with the seal on it, but I felt we didn't want to eat breakfast on that, so I had to take more china. We weren't reimbursed for this expense. The hotel knives, somehow, survived, I still have them, I can't get rid of them! Before we arrived in Rio, we paid some of the staff's salary personally, to assure that they'd be there when we arrived. The cook was considered a "personal servant," therefore the departing Ambassador paid the cook until we picked up paying him. Otherwise we'd have arrived to find no cook and the staff would have left. There was Dona Maria, the housekeeper, two young butlers, Wilson and Samuel, the cook, and Francisca, the laundress and her helper. Then there was Lourdes, the chambermaid and two chauffeurs. I have pictures we took of São Clemente and its personnel. We had a wonderful, wonderful black cook. I'd go down to the kitchen and

ask, "What'll we have today?" And she'd say [she translates], "I'll think about it."

Francisca, the black laundress had a wonderful face. She did the laundry in a little house apart. Even though we had a washing machine, Francisca would build a fire outside the little house, and boil Peter's blue jeans to get them clean. Of course there was no dryer, so all the laundry was hung out in back, even though we were the embassy residence. And then when it came Carnival time, she absolutely filled the place with her lovely big starched white petticoats, [The Bahian costume, with layers of full, white petticoats and a white gown and headdress.] Francisca had sores on her legs, and when she was sick, I would send the children to the third floor of the residence with her pills. She would bless the children. In 1936, when we went to the inter-American conference [The purpose of the conference was to determine how peace among the American republics might be maintained and safeguarded.] in Buenos Aires. I made a number of Brazilian connections, among them the president -- whose name I can't recall -- of the board of the Santa Casa in Brazil, the Rio city hospital in downtown Rio. All Portuguese colonies had "santa casas", which the Infantas had founded; a combination of asylum and acute hospital. So in 1945 the directors arranged that I could go to the ward, provided this was a non-paid affair. This was really wonderful experience, because I gave the first penicillin. At that time penicillin was beginning, and I remember going down in the evening to the Santa Casa and delivering penicillin to two people with pneumonia.

The fellow who ran the ward was a nice fellow, who I continue to see now, who had done his residency during WW II at Ann Arbor, Michigan. But I was not allowed to practice, because there was a law saying that foreign physicians couldn't practice. I was allowed, however, to go there and help out. I practiced in the sense that I took care of people on the ward. So I learned a great deal about Brazilians whom you don't meet at embassy cocktail parties; and also about parasitic disease. So that later when I was at Maceió [Maceió is the capital of the state of Alagoas in Brazil's northeast.], [for Project Hope in 1973] I knew already quite a little about the disease that was prevalent up there, bilharzia.

When we lived in the Residence, Adolf and I decided we would not speak Spanish, that we must speak Portuguese. So we took ten lessons before we left, and then during lunch at the residence we had Costa Neves, who was a charming young Brazilian Portuguese teacher, come to lunch every day. Adolf tried to get there, and the girls and I learned Portuguese. At the end we'd reached the point where both of us could speak in public in Portuguese.

And did I have fun! In those times the "regulars", that is, the Foreign Service, didn't associate with "ordinary people." So there was somebody who'd been First Secretary there for I don't know how long, and neither he nor his wife spoke Portuguese. So at one of my dinner parties, I made sure that she sat between two gentlemen I knew who did not speak English or any language except Portuguese. I turned to her and said, "You of course have been here so long that of course you can speak --" But I understand it had effect. They took Portuguese lessons afterwards.

Q: These were Embassy people who were career Foreign Service and you called them "regulars"?

BERLE: Yes.

Q: And they hadn't learned the language.

BERLE: Once Beatrice went to play with a daughter of an Embassy "regular" and while they were out playing on the street, the girl explained that her mother had told her not to play with Brazilians. So there was quite a "we" or "they" feeling. You were diplomats, you did not associate with the common people -- don't you know about that?

Q: (laughing) Yes.

BERLE: You only associated in a small circle with other diplomats.

Q: Which was absolutely useless in getting to know anything about Brazil.

BERLE: (as both laugh) Well, but that isn't the point. You were not supposed to know anything. No: the previous Ambassador, Jefferson Caffery [Jefferson Caffery was Ambassador to Brazil 1937-44.], was a very able diplomat in the conventional sense. He was certainly instrumental in preventing Vargas's [Getúlio Vargas was President of Brazil 1930-45, 1951-54.] going over to the Germans entirely. He was technically a good diplomat.

End Tape 1, Side A; begin Side B

BERLE: He socialized with a few of the "gran finos" but on the whole he was not a man of the people in any sense. Of course, the diplomats weren't all that way. I could tell you of one whom I liked who was a consul in São Paulo, whose name I can't recall (perhaps Cecil Cross). What I'm saying is, I wouldn't indict them all, but I think the diplomatic service was much more structured. The whole corps was much smaller, and therefore the few diplomats saw each other all the time. And of course Rio was a much smaller town, then. Seeing Brazilians didn't seem to be very high on the list, except for the "gran finos". The French word for cognac is fin, so the "gran finos" were elegant, wealthy people who moved in the cognac circle.

I should mention how I got the idea of starting the "Voluntarias." That was quite an affair. We had with us this wonderful nurse, Hagie, who had been Peter's child nurse and who was still with us. She was an RN and children's nurse. By now our children were grown up and she wanted to do volunteer work. So she went up into the favelas (slums) and came back horror struck at how cold the children were; it was June or July. She said, "It's an outrage." So at that point there developed out of that what Adolf called the equivalent of his mother's sewing circle when they were ministers outside of Boston.

So in the Embassy ballroom we set up a whole bunch of sewing machines, and the Baronesa de Bonfim, an older woman of impeccable social standing, and others of her circle came one day a week and whirled away on their machines. They did have some concern for the poor but it became, also, "the thing to do" to come to the Embassy to sew. We sewed mainly for the hospital -- layettes for infants, and so on. The project was financed by the women. Singer gave us the sewing machines. The only refreshments served were cafezinho (coffee) and a few cookies; nothing else. This was serious business! And it still goes on.

After I left, there was this dreadful man, Ambassador Pawley [William D. Pawley was Ambassador to Brazil 1946-48.]. The first thing he did was to throw the Voluntarias out of the Embassy. Then Elisa (Lynch), who was no slouch, went to Mme. Dutra, the wife of the President of Brazil, so the sewing circle was transferred to the presidential palace. The event was a considerable loss of good will for the U.S. As a matter of fact, the Voluntarias did become a national organization at one point [In 1982, when her husband was assigned to Recife, Jewell Fenzi, Mrs. Berle's interviewer, worked weekly with the Voluntarias at the Governor's Palace in Pernambuco in the northeast.]. I had started it with two sisters, Elisa Lynch and Lizita Coimbra Bueno. (Elisa's husband was a nephew of Sir Henry Lynch, who originally owned the Embassy residence.) The Embassy residence was huge -- when we arrived, Adolf said, "This is a Miami hotel out of season!"

Q: So, you had the Voluntarias coming once a week, and you worked at the Santa Casa. And you were managing a staff of how many servants?

BERLE: I think it was 13. We let go a rather staid butler, replacing him with two young men in their 20s who used to play games with our children in the Embassy. There were only two rugs in the place -- on the way to Rio, the others had been sunk by a German submarine. The Embassy never got any more until President Truman was coming to visit, after we'd left. One of the things that terrified me involved the furniture that the government provided. There were tables about four feet square, which could be stored on their sides, stacked up. One of the young butlers took great joy in getting one of the children to sit on a table's pedestal and running it up and down the marble halls. If they had fallen off --

Q: You know, you sound like a delightfully refreshing diplomatic family.

BERLE: Well, we were not the typical professional diplomats.

Q: But for those few years, you were representing the United States and I bet the Brazilians loved it. Because, at least in my day, I thought they were socially aware, but they're really sort of relaxed about things.

BERLE: To get different people to come to the Embassy was probably the greatest

triumph, because it had been this closed circle of top people. Once we had a book fair and a lot of people came. The great adventure was -- my daughter Alice is a painter. Portinari [Cândido Portinari, Brazilian artist who had a passion for politics.], who hated ambassadors and so forth, decided to accept us. And Alice had the great privilege of going to Portinari's studio every morning and learning about Brazilian politics. She was there the entire time we were in Rio but eventually she went back to Madeira [School]. My other daughter, Beatrice, stayed in Rio and went to school to Colegio Bennett. The Embassy car would drive her there, then she'd return on the trolley. She was the cynosure of all eyes. All the Brazilian boys in Santo Inacio, the Jesuit school on her route home, craned their necks or jumped on the "bonde", the streetcar, to chat as she rode by. We were in Brazil when WW II ended in Europe. We had a ceremony in the Embassy then, and also when President Roosevelt died. When General Mark Clark came back with the Brazilian Expeditionary Force -- as you know, in Portuguese you can't end a word with a consonant, so he was "Marki Clarki." He put on a show and bought oodles of flowers, enough to supply ten funerals. In the Embassy gardens, he decorated some of the privates of Brazil's Expeditionary Force. We gave a ball in the Embassy. There were a lot of Americans, I recall they came with a picked force of men all six feet tall. We got in a number of Brazilian girls in to dance. Afterward, the GIs were taken to separate functions, and the girls were all taken away by families. The soldiers all left with orchids that the Army had spent so much decorating the Embassy with -- even over every door. I was heard to say that our own entertainment allowance would never have managed that!

While I was working at Santa Casa, I put together a rather interesting text. It's called (she laughs) "The Book of Preventive Medicine." In the Santa Casa they had seminars, and I organized this as a text for common diseases, to be used in the interior. A friend agreed to publish it. We had lectures by a number of Brazilian physicians. Believe it or not, I wrote the chapter on penicillin, which shows you how long ago this was, when penicillin was new. Then we got a very good expert to make an outline of how to make privies. We had someone else write about tropical diseases. He was a parasitologist, one of those scientists who likes to account for every microbe. But I felt that the privy was a really good innovation for the interior -- to keep you from getting amoebas and other parasites. A Brazilian sponsored the book, got the printing, and so on.

To return now to the Foreign Service itself. The rule then was that you had to pay an annual call on the wife of the Secretary of State. Mrs. Hull, the day I went to see her, talked about the Sumner Welles scandal of the time. Which I think is UNPARDONABLE. [Welles] was said to have "propositioned" a black porter when he was in a sleeping car en route to a [Senator Harrison's] funeral. I was alone, on my annual call, and she was discussing my husband's superior. You just don't do that [Welles and Hull were constant rivals. Aided by his special assistant, William Bullitt, Hull "got his man" when Roosevelt was forced to ask for Welles' resignation. FDR was furious with both men and never again asked Bullitt to the White House; pg. 154, A Life in Two Worlds by Beatrice Bishop Berle.].

It might be amusing, skipping back to 4000 Nebraska, to tell how I managed diplomatic dinner parties when my secretary left. She had left; I was working every day. Beatrice, who was twelve, had to take care of diplomatic dinner party seating. The chief of protocol at the State Department at that time was a wonderful person who was known as Summy, I forget his whole name, who had a sense of humor. I said to him, "Why do we have protocol?" And he replied, "Everybody can't go through the same door at the same time." (both laugh). So Beatrice would call him up and ask how the dinner party was to be seated, and would make up one of those little charts, you know. [Summy was George T. Summerlin, Chief of the Protocol Division at the Department of State from 1937 to 1944.] Is the custom of leaving cards still observed?

Q: Here in Washington I would imagine so.

BERLE: The formula dictated that when you called, you turned a corner of the card up. That meant that you personally were there. But a card could just be left, by a chauffeur. I don't recall what we had to do when we first came to Washington. In Rio, Adolf had to call on the ambassadors, but I didn't have to call on the wives.

One of the happy things I remember about 4000 Nebraska was a call by Henry Wallace and [Justice] Hadan Stone -- the latter had been Dean at Columbia Law School, so Adolf knew him quite well, and Stone was, interestingly, a great friend of Henry Wallace. With wives, the six of us used to have intimate dinners once in a while. At Nebraska Avenue we had a garden, and one day Henry Wallace came and planted corn. I wanted to make sure my children saw the Secretary of Agriculture plant corn! (laughter)

When we entertained Arabs, the children were banished most of the day because it was said Arabs didn't like to see girls. One day when Alice and Beatrice had been taken for a walk, they came back each bearing a rose. Alice presented hers to Saud, because he was the older one and she was the older one, and Beatrice presented hers to Faisal [Saud and Faisal were sons of Ibn Saud. Both eventually succeeded their father to rule Saudi Arabia, Saud for eleven years from 1953-64. Faisal (1964-75) was assassinated by a deranged kinsman.]. The two men were sitting on the porch, after perhaps conferring with Adolf over tea. As Beatrice handed Faisal the rose, he sort of leapt forward to accept it and the thorny rose connected with Faisal's nose, which gave the poor child the feeling she'd mucked up somehow.

The people Beatrice had to seat were often very high-ranking. Hull and Sumner didn't entertain, so we had to have ambassadors for dinner. By that time I was in the Public Health Service, an interesting time because we made the first survey of preventive tuberculosis -- taking X-rays with the new small film, now discontinued because it proved poisonous.

When we returned to the U.S. from Brazil in 1946, we went back to New York. The inaugural of Dutra [Eurico Gaspar Dutra was President of Brazil 1945-1951], who'd been democratically elected, had taken place in January, and then Pawley arrived as

Ambassador. Adolf definitely didn't want to remain.

Q: I have one question. With the great conflict between women and their careers in the Foreign Service, you certainly seemed to manage the two beautifully. Did you have any resentment when entertaining seemed to take up your time -- you had these fascinating people, for one thing. Was there any resentment that your husband's career infringed on yours?

BERLE: No! No!

Q: You balanced it all. I'm not sure quite how you did it --

BERLE: (resuming interview after lunch) One of the reasons I think it was easier to balance careers and being the wife of somebody and going a lot of entertaining was that there was help in Washington, where there was a couple and there was always a laundress. But you also have to remember that there were no "convenience foods" and nothing in the freezer. So comparatively there was more housework but there were also more people to do it. It makes quite a big difference.

Q: I heard [social anthropologist] Margaret Mead speak once. She said that she could not have done her career without absolutely devoted help -- someone to look after the children, someone to take care of the house, someone to do all of the necessities of daily life -- which, she said, in the nuclear family today, the mother is expected to do in addition to her career. I cannot imagine working all day at a career and coming home and having to think what to have for dinner and take care of children... I really can't. But to go on, I'm eager to hear about the Saturday clinic that you conducted in the Embassy residence [in Rio].

BERLE: On Saturdays, we scrubbed down one table in the pantry and put the baby on it for an examination.

I just told mothers who brought their babies to this "well-baby clinic" to bring their relatives. (after a pause) I must bring you, the next time, the pictures that we had.

Q: We can make copies of them. How many days did you spend in the hospital every week?

BERLE: I would go in the mornings. When I was with the WPB [War Production Board] in Washington, I would spend the whole day. My older daughter Alice, now a very able, discerning lady, at about age 12 wanted a dog. One rainy February day, she went to the SPCA [Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals] and arrived on the steps of the WPB. Though it was Saturday, I happened to be working, and there she appeared with this wet bedraggled dog on the steps of my office. Fortunately I was good friends with the laboratory technician and she managed to take Alice and the dog. When we started home,

I thought it would be nice to treat Alice to a soda at an ice cream/candy parlor called Nunnally's, near the Mayflower Hotel. As I opened the door, the dog fled. We caught the dog and brought him back. We returned home and before the dinner party scheduled that evening, we had, you could say urgently, to give the dog a bath; Laddie had been quite a while in the pound. But I always felt that adding him to our household was fruitful. Alice really wanted a dog and had been feeling out of it, neglected. Laddie lived happily ever after; in fact he was still living when Alice was married.

Of course, in addition to our entertaining, we seemed always to be going out. Partly as compensation, although of course there was someone to stay with the children, we used to bring back tidbits from cocktail parties, one evening, while Adolf and I were dressing to go out, on a typically hot and humid day in Washington, Alice went to get my beautiful evening bag, and handed it to me. As I opened it, quite permanently melted into its lovely gold lining was what had been a chocolate, brought home from some other party. In those days, there was no way it could have kept its shape in the average non-air-conditioned house.

There was a Peruvian who used to bring the children all sorts of presents, Larco Herrera, who was Vice President of Peru. The time was now about two years after the [1938 inter-American] conference in Lima, and Larco Herrera didn't like the American ambassador to Peru. But he liked Adolf, and he liked Alice. So one day arrived this tremendous package containing 12 little fuzzy teddy bears of different colors and other presents. To my children, the most unimaginable quantity of gifts! None of them were of particular worth, but to the children it was like raining down presents, pink, blue, white, red teddy bears. Larco Herrera's sons were archeologists in northern Peru.

Our time in Washington was an era of enormous parties, for example, [those given by] Evalyn Walsh McLean [Evelyn Walsh McLean was one of the noted Washington hostesses of the day, as was Marie Beale, who lived in historic Decatur House on Lafayette Square. The home of another famous hostess, Virginia Bacon, is now DACOR Bacon House, the club for Diplomatic and Consular Officers Retired, at Eighteenth and F streets, NW.] Alice and Beatrice learned to swim in her pool. Mrs. McLean used to go on the air raid patrol wearing the Hope diamond. My daughter Beatrice was in the car with us on the way home from the Mexican Embassy [on Sixteenth Street, NW]. En route Adolf and I debated whether to stop at Mrs. McLean's party with Beatrice, who was about eleven, or to miss it entirely. We probably didn't want to make an extra trip to take her home because of gas rationing. Mrs. McLean lived then on what became the site of the McLean Gardens apartments.

We decided to go, and we walked in to a large party, the men in black tie, and a huge screen at one end of one the big rooms. "Gilda" [Gilda was not released until 1946. Mrs. Meyerson does not remember the movie.] was the movie, and Beatrice was immediately fascinated by Rita Hayworth singing "Put the Blame on Mame" while stripping off her long gloves. I naturally said, "You don't want to watch that!" At which point Evelyn

McLean, in what was probably dismay, looked at Beatrice, and said "What are we going to do with Beatrice?" Then she added, "Maybe she'd like to wear the Hope diamond." And she took off the diamond and put it around the child's neck. We were there for probably half an hour. Beatrice walked around wearing the Hope diamond, and then we all went home. I don't wear diamonds, and Beatrice mentioned some time later that for a number of years she didn't realize that all diamonds weren't blue [This story is recounted in Blue Mystery: The Story of the Hope Diamond by Susanne Steinem Patch, published by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, 1976.].

One of the other hostesses of that time was Marie Beale. There was a question about getting her a passport. Adolf was closely associated with the dragon chief of the Passport Office, Ruth Shipley, otherwise known as "Ma Shipley." When Marie Beale applied for a passport at the end of the war, Adolf and Mrs. Shipley said, "Well, we must have one lady going abroad!" Mrs. Beale lived in Decatur House and entertained lavishly, with great style.

Mrs. Virginia Bacon was another grande dame. She was a Republican! There were three famous sisters: Mrs. Boardman, who founded the Red Cross; Mrs. Murray Crane, the second wife of the Senator; and Mrs. Keith, who lived on that circle at the end of Georgetown (the name eludes her, probably a reference to Sheridan Circle). *End of Tape 1*

BERLE: (continuing mid-sentence) Henry Adams, in days gone by. She used to tell us about Henry Adams coming to visit her. That subsequently became a Russian house. A friend of ours invited some Russians there and she was horrified. Yes, Mrs. Florence Keith was one of Washington's great ladies. Her bon mot was: "Washington is the city of remembered conversations."

Q: When you were appointed to go to Brazil, as a "non-regular," did anyone give you any advice or any orientation about being an ambassador's wife in those days?

BERLE: No, that element wasn't yet institutionalized. No programs to tell you --

Q: Did you have contact with a woman named Cornelia Bassel?

BERLE: No.

Q: And you learned Portuguese, paid for your own language lessons?

BERLE: Sure. The government didn't pay for anything.

Q: And there was no education allowance for your children.

BERLE: True. Anything paid on their behalf was from our own pockets.

Q: No travel allowance to get Alice to and from school --

BERLE: I think we managed to get her on a government plane. You see, there wasn't much scheduled air service then, so a lot of times you did fly in Army planes. But it was still a moot question whether you'd "get there" at all when you flew on Air Transport Command.

As for other memories of that time in Washington, I recall Mrs. Irenée Robbins. Her husband was related to President Roosevelt, his name was Delano. She had snow-white hair and had tinted it slightly lavender. My daughters would peer at her in fascination. I was pouring tea for Mrs. Robbins and Alice and Beatrice, looking in, saw the lady with the purple hair. Sitting on the arm of a sofa just outside in the foyer, swinging their legs, they were chanting:

I never saw a purple cow/I never hope to see one
But I can tell you anyhow I'd rather see than be one.

That's when their father came in, and he was furious! (loud laughter)
[note: the sequel that Stephen Leacock composed many years later:

Ah yes, I wrote the 'purple cow'
I'm sorry now I wrote it/
But I can tell you anyhow/I'll kill you if you quote it.]

In the Woodley house, there was a beautiful wisteria vine, very luxuriant. Beatrice having suffered illness, at age eight looked more like a six-year-old. She could climb up into the vine and completely hide in it. One of those times after Adolf had been speaking with Whitaker Chambers, he told Beatrice, "Some day you're going to be up there and overhear state secrets, you'd better tell me when you are up there." In back of Woodley was an enormous copper beech, a kind of tree easy for children to climb, the branches sort of like stair steps. Beatrice, being so small, could climb higher than the other children, even into the thin part near the top. It was one of her chief enthusiasms. Our family moved from Henry Stimson's house to Single Oak, the house next door, and Beatrice said, "But Daddy, I won't be able to climb the copper beech." "Oh, yes you will. You can come back and climb it." "But suppose Secretary Stimson finds me," she said, "What will I do?" And Adolf told her, "Well, you just climb down out of the tree and tell him that you're Adolf Berle's daughter, Beatrice Berle, and your father is in State, and State precedes War, so it's all right for you to climb the tree." Beatrice continued to climb the tree but she never met Secretary Stimson.

Q: We can't not talk about this period without my asking you, did you know Eleanor (Mrs. Franklin Delano) Roosevelt?

BERLE: I'm sorry to say that I never saw very much of her. The people who worked with her, admired her, but since I was full-time doing something else, I really never knew her well. I admired her very much. From my point of view at the time, before she became "first lady of the world," while she was the President's wife, I was very concerned, because there's no question that she was a lady without serious academic training; so that she got a lot of -- Adolf used to be greatly worried -- she got mixed up with a lot of people who took advantage of her. Certainly, knowing that she came from the same kind of world that I came from, I knew what a tremendous, tremendous job she had done with herself. Whereas I had had to fight to go to college, and did, and got a good academic education, she had not. So her powers of discrimination were not, alas, astute. She was indeed a great lady of the world, an extraordinary person.

Q: Where did you go to school?

BERLE: Brearley School in New York City. And then Vassar College. Then I got an M.A. in history at Columbia, and my M.D. from New York University in Manhattan. As I said, I felt badly that Eleanor Roosevelt had been denied the opportunity of a serious education because there was "too much heart," and she could have had as much heart without perhaps as -- no: Adolf used to be very worried because she'd get taken for a ride by various radical groups during the Roosevelt Administration.

Q: Can you imagine denying a woman of her capability an education.

BERLE: Well, you must know people who are 75 and 80, for whom going to college was not the thing to do. It was definitely not the thing to do.

Q: You were, of course, an extraordinary example of bucking the mores of her class.

BERLE: Plenty of people went to college in the early part of this century but not from that world.

Q: My family was an academic family -- my mother is 88, she had a college degree, so had my father, my aunts all have advanced degrees. I guess I grew up not realizing that was somewhat of a privilege in their day.

BERLE: There were plenty of women who went to college, but not people from the so-called society with a capital S.

Q: Yes, they went to finishing school, and they took the Grand Tour, and they got married.

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Adolf A. Berle (Deceased)

Spouse Entered Service: 1938

Left Service: 1946

You Entered Service: Same

Left Service: Same

Status: Widow of non-career AE

Posts:

1938-45 Assistant Secretary of State, Department of State, Washington, DC

1945-46 Ambassador, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Place and Date of birth: August 6, 1902

Maiden Name: Bisho

Parents (Name, Profession):

Cortlandt E Bishop

Amy Bend Bisho

Schools (Prep, University):

Brearley School NYC 1919

Vassar College BA 1923

Columbia University MA 1924

NY School of Social Work 1927

NYU School of Medicine 1938

Date and Place of Marriage: New York City, Grace Church, December 17, 1927

Profession: MD

Children:

Alice Crawford

Beatrice Meyerson

Peter Berle

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:

A. At Post: Volunteer - Founder and Director of Voluntarias and Visiting MD, Santa Casa (Hospital), Rio de Janeiro

B. In Washington, DC: Paid - Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine, George Washington Medical School; Major, U.S. Public Health Service c. 1942-44

Honors (Scholastic, FS related):

Cruzeiro do Sul, Brazil

End of interview