

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project
Women Ambassadors Series

AMBASSADOR RUTH LEWIS FARKAS

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INTERVIEW

Q: The other day we were talking about your mother, and she sounded to me like a very remarkable person, way ahead of her time. Would you tell us more about her?

FARKAS: Well, what can I tell you about her? She was the early, I should say, "liberated lady," but she never felt that way. I mean, she just was her own self, but she had very special ideas about people and humanity. My parents owned a lot of these houses on the middle East Side, like on 118th Street between Second and Third, and Third and Lexington, and 119th Street and 112th Street, where, you know, a lot of people who were early immigrants came and settled there, with their own families, or lived with families of friends.

Q: Sure.

FARKAS: And, of course, a lot of them had very little income, as you know, and often, when the breadwinner of the family would die, there was nobody to help them, except if you went to the Church, or the Synagogue, or the Mosque, or whatever it was, and so she had decided in her later life that what she would like to do was set up some kind of a program in which, if the Church, or the Synagogue, or any other religious group would promise to feed them and help clothe them, she'd give them free rent.

Q: Really?!

FARKAS: Yes, and she did that for many years. In fact, she was written up as one of the best landlords--you know, the *Times*; eventually she was written up as the Best Landlord of the Year. Not that it meant anything to her.

Q: It certainly did to the people.

FARKAS: When Mother died, my brother took over, and he carried this out for a few years. But finally, he said to my two brothers and myself and my sister, "I'm not going to run this any more." He said, "What we're doing is, we're paying the government for keeping them and the government doesn't help us. I'm just giving whatever we have away to the banks, or whoever the heck wants it."

Q: Is that right?

FARKAS: And he asked us if we wanted it. And I said, "Not me," and my brothers didn't want it and so it went to the banks or whoever else wanted it. Because in one house, there were only two people paying rent out of 35 tenants and the others, you know--and you had to keep it going. I mean, they needed water, they needed heat . . .

Q: Sure, of course, taxes.

FARKAS: And taxes. Never mind that. You had to have--in those days, they called them janitors, not monitors or managers. But that's what she did. She was a great girl.

Q: Where was she educated?

FARKAS: Right here in the United States. She came here when she was, I think, about 10 months old.

Q: And where'd she come from?

FARKAS: Germany. Now I'll tell you a really funny story. She was born in Germany, and then my grandfather had his brother living in England, and they went to England, but in the process of very few months, one of my uncles got St. Vitus Dance, and the doctor said the only thing that would help him--in those days, they didn't have much--was a trip across the ocean. And so that's what impelled them to come to the United States.

Q: So that's why they came?

FARKAS: Yes. And it helped. The sea voyage was helpful.

Q: Good, good. Did you tell me that she was a nurse, studying to be a nurse?

FARKAS: Yes, she was studying to be a nurse. And I told you her fiancé, a doctor, died, so, she left that. She wasn't interested in it anymore.

Q: Well, what about your dad?

FARKAS: My father came from Russia.

Q: He, himself, came from Russia?

FARKAS: Well, he had two brothers here before. But he came from Russia, from a middle-income family. He came with \$2,000. That was a lot of money in those days.

Q: That was a lot of money--a lot of money.

FARKAS: A fortune. You know, in those days in Russia, a Jewish person had to get into the Army. They rarely got out. You got out maybe when you were killed or--Lord knows how they ever got out. I mean, they never had a chance like the others.

Q: Was this specifically the Jews? Or did it happen to any Russian?

FARKAS: No, no. The others got out, but Russian Jews didn't get out unless they were maimed. They used to have a thing in Russia--I don't know about it, but my father told me--that a lot of Russian people who had only one son would have him--I don't know, maimed, or something; have a foot broken or something, so they shouldn't have to go into the Army, because they knew he'd never get out.

Q: That bad?

FARKAS: Oh, really!

Q: The persecution goes on forever, doesn't it?

FARKAS: Terrible. Oh, that was a minor one; it was always terrible, so my grandfather sent each son, as they were about ready to get into the Army, to the United States. He gave them money, enough to keep them going for a while. And so my father came here and the first thing he did was to matriculate at the Eron School downtown, because he wanted to learn English. He knew a little English when he came. He took courses in English, American History, and I don't know what else; I think something to do with business. He was there for a year. He knew more about American history, I think, than most Americans ever learned. Then, after that, he decided that he'd just better get himself a job, so he did. He got himself a job in Singer Sewing Machine--He learned to speak English very well, by the way. He was very adept at languages; I guess that's what made me so adept. And as he was working for the Singer Sewing Machine, he also saw good pieces of property here and there. In those days you needed not that much money to put a deposit down. And that's how he started in the real estate business.

Q: How did he meet your mother?

FARKAS: Well, as I told you, my mother's fiancé died, and, I don't know--he went to some kind of a business meeting, or something, and met my grandfather. He was a very gentle, well-spoken man; my father was. [My grandfather was] quite impressed with him. My grandfather said, "Do you have much family here?" And he said, "No." You know how fathers are; he even brought him to the house, and he met my mother.

Q: I see.

FARKAS: And my mother wasn't too impressed. [Laughs].

Q: It makes a good story.

FARKAS: Well, you know, it's one thing being engaged to a doctor and then meeting a man who's in business. It was a big difference to her; plus, her fiancé had been an American, and she said my father was a foreigner. So it took a long time; it took them a year and a half before she'd even consider the whole situation, but she finally married him. And it was a very good marriage, a fruitful marriage--five kids: two girls and three boys, and the boys were very capable people.

Q: What place are you in the family?

FARKAS: I'm next to the youngest.

Q: Is the youngest a girl or boy?

FARKAS: Boy. And my sister was the oldest, then the two brothers, myself, and then my third brother.

Q: So that all of the practicing on the older children was out of the way by the time you came along.

FARKAS: That's right.

Q: Don't you think it takes a while to learn how to be a parent?

FARKAS: Well, my mother didn't make a whole deal of us, you know. She knew what she wanted us to do. And she was not such a disciplinarian--to say that you had to do; you had to do--but she expected, when she asked us for something that could be done, that it would be done. And as she said, some had to be done on the minute and some you had time to think about.

Q: Was she the disciplinarian of the family?

FARKAS: Yes. My father was an easy mark.

Q: Was he? Especially with his daughters?

FARKAS: Yes. [Laughs.]

Q: The family had a lot of love, I gather?

FARKAS: Yes We were very close.

Q: Were you brought up strictly in your faith?

FARKAS: No.

Q: No?

FARKAS: No. My mother's parents were very free that way; if they wanted to practice the religion, fine. If they didn't--no force! I mean, you know, the two main holidays, the Jewish holidays, Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, for those they attended Temple--my parents did, but my brothers--well, as they were growing up, they did, but when they started away at Columbia College, you know, they sloughed.

Q: Yes, sure.

FARKAS: And one of my brothers married out of the faith. Well, my mother's brother married out of the faith; he was the first one--married a Catholic lady.

Q: Oh, yes?

FARKAS: And then, my brother was also married to a Catholic lady. Good marriages, so that wasn't a great thing, really.

Q: No Kosher kitchen?

FARKAS: No, no. But, tell you the truth, after the Second World War, when we lost some very young ones in our family, my father became absolutely anti-religious.

Q: Oh, really? Yes, I can understand that.

FARKAS: He said, "I don't believe in any God. I don't believe in anything like that because He couldn't possibly have any mercy in His thoughts." He said, "I don't really care. I pay when I die. It's dust. Don't worry about it." And that's the way he felt.

Q: Well, you can understand that.

FARKAS: Yes, I could, I could. Very, very anti-. In the Jewish religion, when boys become 13, they become Bar Mitzvahed, as one would say, and I asked my mother if I had the oldest grandson, would she want him to be Bar Mitzvahed? And she said, "I really don't care. "Well," she said, "maybe it'd be nice." But then she had an accident, as I told you, and she died; so he didn't do it, and I didn't make him. But then, with all these things coming along, anti-this and anti-that, I said to my husband, "I think our sons should be Bar Mitzvahed. Whatever they think later, they don't have to [practice], but right here under our roof, I think they should."

I remember--my mother died and my father lived with me for 11 years--my father saying to one of my sons, "Don't get Bar Mitzvahed. I can give you as many presents as you're going to get."

Q: [Laughs.] Wasn't quite the idea of it, was it?

FARKAS: I said, "Please, Pop, don't do that. You've just got to stop it." I said, "I want them to know where they belong." He said, "If they're good human beings, that's where they belong." Well, that's true, so, anyway, nothing was forced on them really. The three of them were Bar Mitzvahed, but they went to an Episcopalian school, Choate.

Q: Oh, they went to Choate.

FARKAS: All of them. And, of course, you know, Choate is very strict--was--not today so much, but then, strict on chapel. You know, chapel every day. Chapel, Saturday; chapel, Sunday, whatever--chapel. Their education was more Episcopalian, I would say, than anything else. And I didn't force them. Whatever they wanted to do, they did. I mean, I just said, "You do what you want." Well, my oldest son was divorced several times. Two of his wives were non-Jewish and two were. He had a choice.

My youngest son is married to a Christian girl, who converted. But we didn't ask her to. My husband said, "Look, that doesn't mean a thing to us." She said, "I want my children to know they belong to a proud, Jewish family, and proud of their name." She said, "They have to know where they belong." Her parents had been divorced a long time ago. They were old Americans--all Daughters of the American Revolution and Colonial Wars, and all that kind of business. She said, "I didn't see that it did any more for us, so I want my children to know where they belong." So she converted.

Q: Very honorable.

FARKAS: Yes. She's a wonderful girl.

Q: Your grandfather--did you remember him?

FARKAS: Oh, yes. He was in the real estate business.

Q: Was your grandmother alive, too?

FARKAS: Yes. I remember my grandfather more than my grandmother because my grandfather was another strong man. I think my mother took after him. You know, he'd sit down sometimes and little as we were, he would talk sensibly to us. "What did you do today? Did you like what you did?" Or sometimes I'd say, "I don't like that person." My grandfather would say, "You don't like them, or you don't like what they did, which?" He always used to say that. "Remember what you don't like." So he remains in my mind very much, and my brothers', too, I think.

Q: So he was an influence, definitely.

FARKAS: Yes, yes. Not my grandmother. I mean, she was lovely; she was nice, very pretty. But I also know, when we were kids, we used to have these little chocolate dolls, used to call them "nigger babies" in those days, and you'd go to the store and they were on a big strip of paper, and maybe for one cent, you'd get about ten. When we'd go to my grandmother's house, she always had loads of them. We always had to hug her and kiss her, of course, before we got them. She evidently must have had some kind of arthritis or rheumatism. In those days they'd have that peppermint ointment--I don't know what that was. I don't know whether it was peppermint; some kind of lotion to put on. I hated that stuff. So I used to stand like a stiff board and she kissed us. [Laughter]

Q: You didn't want the smell.

FARKAS: But I wanted the "nigger babies" or whatever.

Q: Did your other grandparents ever come over from Russia?

FARKAS: No, no.

Q: So you never really even met them, did you?

FARKAS: No. All I know is my father's father lived to the age of 105.

Q: Really!

FARKAS: And, as I say, he must have been quite comfortable to send his sons here.

Q: Indeed.

FARKAS: I don't know much that he had, but I know he had some kind of a shop that sold bulk material.

Q: Wholesaler, sort of?

FARKAS: Yes. It seems that some Russian Cossacks came into the store and wanted some things. He wasn't about to hand over anything whatever, and they killed him. They just killed him, like that!

Q: Dreadful!

FARKAS: But he lived a good, long life.

Q: Still, he didn't deserve that death.

FARKAS: Well, those things happen.

Q: Yes, especially in Russia. Did you know your father's brothers?

FARKAS: Oh, yes.

Q: And your mother had lots of brothers and sisters, so you had a big family.

FARKAS: Yes. My mother had two brothers and she had two sisters. There were five kids.

Q: And you knew them all, I suppose? Spent holidays . . .

FARKAS: Oh, yes. One of them, my uncle, was a very, very well known man in New York City, Joseph J. Bach. My mother's maiden name was Bach. He was supposedly, at that time, the First Vice President of the Public Bank; now it's Public National Bank. He graduated from the--I forget--one of those private schools, I don't know which. My grandfather believed in education, period. Everybody had to be educated one way or the other.

Q: This is really rather unusual for people who have just come over, to immediately, you know--

FARKAS: Well, remember when my grandfather came. They were infants. What did they know?

Q: Oh, that's true. They grew up here.

FARKAS: My mother was ten months old. The next brother was--the one who went to Columbia was born here. But the others were young. Their main language was the American language.

Q: So, since they were expected to go to school, naturally, you were expected to go to school.

FARKAS: Oh, natch. Yes.

Q: It was just something you knew you were going to do.

FARKAS: Oh, there was no question. The question, more often, in my mother's mind was, where were we going?

Q: And did your mother sort of suggest areas of interest, or did she leave that up to you? As to what you would major in?

FARKAS: No. I'll tell you what she used to do. We used to look forward to it. Every other Saturday, we used to go to what we called "the houses." Well, if she went to the houses, she'd take my youngest brother and me. And she took us a lot. In those days, you sat in the janitor's apartment until my mother came down. Or sometimes she'd take us upstairs to an apartment where there were people, and she used to say, "Now you sit quietly and listen," while she talked to the plumbers, the painters. I remember very often her saying to my brother and me, "You know how lucky you are? Do you realize how lucky you are? All the things you enjoy that these children don't?" You know, really, I think that's what made us--all of us--we have always interested ourselves in volunteer things, all of us.

Q: Is that right? All of you?

FARKAS: All of us. We always did something. I can remember my sister was very active with this Hudson Guild, downtown. And my brother, Percy, was one of the best known--Big Brothers. He used to take a lot of children--he never had children-- to his home, for the holidays, and things like that. We all did something.

Q: And your mother planted those seeds when you were small.

FARKAS: And my father, too; but Mother was more vocal about it.

Q: That's very commendable. Was everybody healthy in your family growing up?

FARKAS: Yes.

Q: All the children healthy?

FARKAS: Yes unless they had accidents. My brother, just older than I, was quite an athlete, this kid. Even when he was young he was doing things. I'll never forget one Sunday. I went some place with my parents, and my mother left him and an older brother home. She said to my older brother, "Don't let him out of your sight because you know he'll sure get into trouble." They went down the street for something and there was a big high fence across the way. We lived on 107th Street, right near Fifth Avenue. He jumped

off the fence and fell into an ashcan. I had to laugh, because I'll never forget it, because my father, mother and I and my younger brother were coming down the street, and there was a whole big crowd around and my mother said to my father, "I'll bet you that's Jonie."

My father says, "Can't be. Told Percy to take care of him." Sure enough! There was Jonie! In the ashcan! Somebody tried to extricate him. Somebody told him that he bet he couldn't jump from those big high fences they used to have signs on. He jumped from this fence into the ashcan. He made it all right. But he was always doing something like that. You know, one of these kids. But he was one of Columbia University's best broad jumpers; he got all kinds of letters for that. My other brother was a sprinter. They were both good athletes.

Q: Did you play together? Or did you have groups of friends with other children?

FARKAS: Oh, no. We had friends. My mother encouraged us to bring friends into the house. She liked it.

Q: Did you like girl things or boy things?

FARKAS: Either one.

Q: Either one?

FARKAS: I'll tell you the truth. Being brought up with boys--my sister got married when I was just about seven and a half; she was ten and a half years older than I. She left school--first year in college--went off and got married. And so I was with my brothers a lot. In fact, to tell you the truth, when I graduated from high school, [there] was a school for young ladies on Fifth Avenue, in the '80s. I got out of high school quite young. My mother said, "You're not going away to school yet. You're going to stay home." So she sent me to this school for young ladies. She said, "You need a finishing school anyway. You've been brought up with your brothers; you act more like a boy than a girl." You know: they fight me, I fight them.

Q: So she sent you to Miss So-and-So's School on Fifth Avenue.

FARKAS: I remember coming home one day and I said, "If you think I'm learning anything, I'm not learning a darn thing." She says, "You're not?" I said, "No. You're throwing your money out, because I'm not learning anything." I said, "They teach you how to be the wife of an ambassador and they teach you how to present yourself to the Queen." I said, "I'm not learning anything."

Q: Didn't know that was going to be part of your life, did you?

FARKAS: You know, it's a funny thing. She said to me, "Well, you never know." She said, "One day you can be the wife of an ambassador, or one yourself."

Q: And, you just laughed at her.

FARKAS: But I tell you, when I did become the ambassador, nobody had to tell me about protocol or anything like that. I was very grateful. In fact, my husband said to me one day, "If your mother were alive, she'd say, 'Well, I told you'."

Q: Which she would. That's a nice story.

FARKAS: I was well prepared. I hated that for a whole year.

Q: Was that just a one-year thing?

FARKAS: Yes. In those days you went to a finishing school for a year.

Q: Well, now, until that time, you had gone to the New York City schools, had you?

FARKAS: No. Well, up until the 6th grade, I went to a New York City school. And then, in New York City at that time, they took the brightest boy and girl out of each school and sent them to an experimental school, the Speyer Experimental School, which is part of Columbia University. And--I was supposed to be the brains. James Speyer. It was called the James Speyer School because he gave the money for it. You went there for two years, but you did three years in two, and when you entered high school, you entered the second year of high school, not the first.

Q: I see. This was a junior high situation.

FARKAS: Yes. Well, it was from the 6th--from the 7th grade to first year of high school.

Q: You did 7th, 8th, and 9th?

FARKAS: Yes. Right. It was a great school because we were taught how to organize. The students ran the school, and any problems that came up, we would have a group and we'd sit down and decide whether they were right or wrong. They didn't try in any way to make us do what they wanted. A brilliant bunch.

Q: It must have been very good for you, because it would really give you a challenge to be pitted against your peers.

FARKAS: Yes, yes. It was really quite good; quite good. And after that, we moved out of New York City. We moved out to the Island. My uncle had a big home out in Flushing. In those days, you had to take a train to get there. There was no way by road. It was really country then. My mother bought a lovely home--my mother and father--and my uncle had a home right next door, so there were about 8 or 9 acres between the both of us. We had a lot of fun. He had about five kids, too. We're a very close family.

Q: That's great. So you went to Flushing high school?

FARKAS: Yes, I graduated from Flushing High.

Q: And obviously, you were a good student.

FARKAS: Yes.

Q: What sort of activities did you take part in when you were in high school?

FARKAS: Well, I don't know. We used to have bike groups. I belonged to the French Club, and I had a Spanish teacher whom I adored. I guess that's what made me major in languages. I loved her so that if she walked down the street and I saw her, I'd follow her for 2 or 3 blocks just to talk to her.

Q: School paper?

FARKAS: No. But I was on the school basketball team. I was active in a lot of things. If you were a good student there, you were allowed to come to school at 8 o'clock, and from 8 to 9, they taught you speed-writing; stenography and typing.

Q: Oh, did they? So, you took that?

FARKAS: I took it.

Q: Did you have a high school yearbook?

FARKAS: Oh yes, we had one.

Q: You didn't take part in that?

FARKAS: No. I was more active in the languages, basketball and sports--tennis, things like that.

Q: You were very athletic. Would you say that when you were younger, you were a bit of tomboy?

FARKAS: Well, that's what my mother said. That was the reason for finishing school.

Q: You were obviously good at athletics or you wouldn't have done them. You must have learned to swim, didn't you?

FARKAS: Oh, yes. I had one of these lifesaver's things.

Q: Did you? What about Girl Scouts, that sort of thing?

FARKAS: No.

Q: No Girl Scouts?

FARKAS: No. You didn't need it; there was enough to do at home. My brothers at home, my cousins lived right next door, and then another cousin lived about four blocks up. So there were a lot of us kids.

I'll never forget: There's a picture called *Over the Hill to the Poorhouse*, and there was a cinema in Flushing Saturday afternoon. You could go at 3 o'clock if somebody delivered you, either your mother or your father, and you were with an older person in the family. So we'd get my cousin, who was 16 and we'd go, you know. We used to look forward to it. But this time there was this picture, *Over the Hill to the Poorhouse*. I'll never forget it. We all went in and we sat down, and this picture starts about this poor old woman that nobody wanted. I started to cry. I cried so loud, the usher came down and said, "If you don't keep quiet, you're going out." So everybody's pushing me and shoving me, and my brother says, "If you don't stop it, I'll knuckle you." I couldn't help it, so I cried again. They wanted to put me out. We had five other cousins, and they said, "If she goes, we go." "Well," they said, "you're all going." I'll never forget it. We all had to go out of the movie. But the thing is, my cousin said, "Look, you didn't let us finish the movie. We want our money back." The guy said, "You saw half the picture, so you get half the money back."

Q: [Laughs.]

FARKAS: I'll never forget. We went and got some sodas; not so bad.

Q: Not so bad; no.

FARKAS: I just couldn't help it.

Q: Yes, even then you were very moved by other people's problems.

FARKAS: I was very touched. I don't know why, but I always do get touched by the elderly people. Always, always, always.

Q: That's interesting.

FARKAS: I don't know why. When I was in Luxembourg, I became interested in the aging set. Everybody else there thought I was whacks, you know.

Q: I know that you brought them into your home and entertained them.

FARKAS: People I didn't even know, but the fact of being in the hospital and being ill . . . Either the families are disappearing or are nonexistent. It's sad.

Q: It is; it is sad. Absolutely true. A couple questions about your course work: Did your parents make a distinction in your education? You said your mother sent you to a finishing school, but as far as what they expected you to achieve, did they differentiate between their sons and their daughters?

FARKAS: No, whatever you wanted.

Q: I see; I see.

FARKAS: If I wanted to be a doctor, I could have been; if I wanted to be a lawyer, I could have. Nobody told me what to do. I mean, just as long as I was doing something to educate myself.

Q: And they felt that you should achieve as much as your brothers?

FARKAS: Right, no doubt about it. And also know that you're an adult at one time in your life and that you have to know that you depend on yourself many times in your life. You never know what circumstances [will] hit you; and, therefore, you must be able to be do something to take care of yourself, which I think is very important. My parents never told me what to do. I told you, I was so crazy about my Spanish teacher that I decided languages were for me.

Q: And this was in high school.

FARKAS: Uh-hmm. So that when I went to college--my mother wasn't well. I was supposed to go to Cornell; I didn't. I stayed home. Went to NYU.

Q: Because your mother was ill?

FARKAS: She wasn't well at the time, and since I was the youngest daughter--that's overdoing it; I felt I shouldn't. In the first place, I was supposed to go to Barnard, and one of my best friends, Beulah Lustgarten, was a member of the Guggenheim family--her mother was. Otto Meyers, her uncle, gave a lot to Columbia and Barnard. We'd done everything together since I moved out to the Island. She wouldn't go to Barnard; she just wouldn't. She said, "I'll go any place you go, but not Barnard." I said, "Well, let's go to NYU." She said, "Okay." And I'll tell you something: for me, unknowingly at the time, I think it was the best place I ever chose to go.

Q: Why was that?

FARKAS: Well, I'll tell you why. first of all, I was very active there in communal things like Henry Street Center, Irvington House, transitional neighborhoods. Really active. You wouldn't do that if you got into a place like Cornell or Ithaca; you just wouldn't have done it. So that it made me aware very early in life of the vicissitudes of life, and the needs. I

think, perhaps, I might not have probably gone into what I went into if it hadn't been for my early sort of life with my mother, going into these apartment houses, and living in a city like New York.

Q: You probably would have gone into the academic world.

FARKAS: Possibly, possibly. But I went to NYU. That's where I was active in all these things. I joined a sorority, one of the best in school, but not the best, because this friend of mine wasn't accepted to the one that I was accepted to. I wouldn't go. So I got into the next best one, because she could. She was a great friend. She died of cancer very early.

Q: Did she? This is a national social sorority you're talking about?

FARKAS: Yes. And so, I think it was--[Interruption by phone call]. As I say, living in a big city opens your eyes to a lot of things. Because of that, you see, you get to know people who are interested in those things, so that later in life, those are the things you sort of choose to do.

Q: You found your path pretty early on, didn't you?

FARKAS: Yes, I did; I really did. Because I was encouraged by my mother.

Q: Back to your days at Columbia, you were majoring in languages when you commenced--

FARKAS: I went to NYU, you mean.

Q: I'm sorry--when you went to NYU. Columbia came later, of course.

FARKAS: Yes. I majored--I took French, Spanish and eight years of Latin; four in high school and four in college. The only thing it helps is my little granddaughter.

Q: You help her with her homework?

FARKAS: With her Latin. This is very cute--they have this Grandparents' Day at school, and of course, I always go. I don't know why, but I always hit the Latin class, and you know, the teacher asks questions. Samantha leans over; she says, "Grandma." So one day--last year, in fact, when we were leaving, the teacher said, "You know, Samantha, your grandmother gets AN A for today."

Q: [Laughs] Cute! How old is Samantha?

FARKAS: She's 12.

Q: Well, did you find that your speed-writing and secretarial skills helped you in college? Did you use them at all?

FARKAS: Well, sometimes I took my notes. I found that if a professor spoke rapidly I would use it. As time went on, I didn't, but I feel what I did use is the typing.

Q: You took that not knowing what you'd use it for, but you felt it might come in handy?

FARKAS: Well, I felt I wanted to know it. I'm very glad I did.

Q: At that time, you were studying languages and forming your ideas about what you were going to do in the future. You knew you wanted something to do with social work, perhaps.

FARKAS: Something in that area.

Q: Something to do with people, anyway.

FARKAS: Yup. I knew that's where I was going. I figured with languages, you could talk to a lot of people.

Q: Exactly. Where did you live? Did you commute?

FARKAS: No. After I entered the first year of college, my brothers--one brother had just finished Columbia and had gone into Columbia Law; the other one was finished at Columbia Law, so we moved to Riverside Drive at 114th Street to be nearer Columbia.

Q: What about dating? Did you date a lot?

FARKAS: Oh, yes.

Q: High school?

FARKAS: In high school, not too much, but I'll tell you why: I had a lot of cousins around our own age, I had a brother two and a half years older than I and one 20 months younger, so that we had our own group. So, dating alone--not too much. Mother said, "You have enough cousins and brothers, you don't need to go--"

Q: Also, she was a little bit gun-shy, after your sister getting married so young.

FARKAS: Yes, I know. Oh, yes, yes. That was something in her mind, but really. I mean, it was drummed into my head. She used to say, "You're never going to get married before you finish your education. That's one thing I promised myself." Well, I wasn't too interested in anyone anyway at that point.

Q: Sure, sure. You dated and all that sort thing. But you married at quite a young age.

FARKAS: Well, you know--yes. I graduated, and the same month I graduated I got married. I was engaged for a year and a half. I've known my husband since I was 11 years old.

Q: Oh, I didn't realize that. He was part of your group?

FARKAS: No, not at all. No. We lived in New York at first, you know, before we moved out. His father had just died, and so he moved to the same house that we lived in. He had a sister my age; in fact, there was six months' difference. And so--I mean, I wasn't going with him, but I knew him. I didn't like him, but I knew him. His father died when he was 16. Well, I won't go into that. However, he was pushed into a business he didn't want to go into because he had four sisters. His father left several clothing stores and manufacturing businesses. He hated it, and his mother forced him into it. So, of course, he was a boss when he was 17, 18.

He was six years older than I. You know, kids--I'd play with his sister sometimes. I'll never forget the time he had some girl in the house; I don't know who. Well, anyway, we were playing Jacks--you know the game--and he was in the living room talking to this young lady, whoever she was, and they had this Victrola, and the record, evidently, got through playing and was scratching. So I got up and took the needle off and he came out and said, "Who did that?" I said, "I did." He said, "You know you're a very, very fresh young lady, touching things you shouldn't touch. That's a very expensive instrument." I said, "We have one and it's not so important." But I left and went home to my mother and I cried. I said, "He's fresh. I hate him."

My mother said, "Well, you should have left the record scratch." "Why let it scratch when you're going to ruin them?" "Well," she said, "don't take it so seriously. You'll talk to him again." The first time my mother saw him after this event, he was in the elevator with her, and he said she practically stared him out of the elevator. He said she just looked at him; didn't say one word--but just looked at him, you know. He said he couldn't wait for that elevator to land at our floor.

Q: Your mother seems to have been a fighter. Quite a frightening lady.

FARKAS: Not frightening; fair and wonderful. Not a loud girl; very quiet, very quiet. But of course, the more angry she got, the quieter she got.

Q: That's the dangerous type.

FARKAS: Yes. Just like my sons always say that the eye on the dollar bill, that's Mother's eye when she's angry.

Q: [Laughs] Anyway, you dated many other people, and eventually you came back to Mr. Farkas.

FARKAS: I didn't go out with a lot of others, but enough. And then I went to a 16th birthday party. We were still living out of New York at that time, because we didn't move back until I was 17.

I remember it was at Rudy Vallee's; he had this club that I think was called the Cabana Room. Really, that was something; it was very, very nice, very chichi, and this friend of mine's mother gave this 16th birthday party for her and my mother allowed me to go. She said to this young man that I was going with, "She's not allowed to dance with any one that you don't know. No one. Remember that." He took it seriously 'cause he liked me.

My future husband was there with another young lady and another couple, and he came over to my table and said, "Hi, Ruth. How are you?" I said, "Fine." He said, "Could I have this dance?" My date said, "No, you can't." "What do you mean? Why?" "Because I don't know you." He said, "Maybe you don't know me, but she does." I told you, I didn't like him that much anyway. I didn't say anything; just sat there. Boy, he never forgave me for that one.

Q: At what point did you begin to be interested in him?

FARKAS: When I moved back to New York. He called one night for a date, and I told him I was sorry, I was busy. Then he called a few times. "I'm sorry, I'm busy." Mother said, "Once is enough--just say you don't want to go. I don't like this business, 'I'm busy; I'm busy.'"

There was kind of a streak in me, if you're going to tell me "Don't do it," well, for no good reason, I'm going to do it. So if my mother said that, I said, "I am going out with him." She said, "Then say so."

The next time he called and asked to go out with me, it was winter. I was a good ice skater, so was he. I said, "Let's go ice skating." He said, "Fine." And we went. I'll never forget. We went up to Van Cortland Park, and when we got there, the flag was up--"DANGER." You couldn't go. He said, "Now what are we going to do?"

Well, one of my brothers, the one that was at Columbia, had said, "If you don't like a fellow, just make him spend a lot of money on you. One night take him to an expensive restaurant, and he'll never take you out again." (both laugh)

Q: That'll be it, eh?

FARKAS: That's it. So he said to me, "Where would you like to go?" I didn't know much about it, but I remember my brothers talking about this place called Katinka. At that time, it was Prohibition, you know. So I said, "I want to go to Katinka." So down we go to Katinka. I'll never forget it. We went to Katinka; took a taxi down. I ordered caviar and toast and what-not, and tea. I started with the caviar; I hated it. He ordered a chicken

sandwich on toast. And you were supposed to take a drink. It didn't make any difference to me what I took because I didn't drink. He didn't take anything. He never liked liquor. Anyway, I said, "I don't like this, could I have something else? I think I'll have a chicken sandwich, like you did." He said, "Fine."

Well, the next day, my brother said, "Did you have a good time?" I said, "No." "What did you do?" I told him. He said, "You took him to Katinka?" I said, "Yes." And I told him what I did. He said, "Well, you can mark him off your list, kid. Got rid of him good." Nothing doing. Don't believe it!

Q: He'd apparently been very interested in you all along, but you hadn't realized it.

FARKAS: Well, yes. When he was about maybe 18, 19, I was still living in Flushing, taking stenography and typing and stuff like that. He was going to Columbia at night and taking courses in business management, and he could never balance; he could never make a trial balance. I could. I remember one afternoon, Sunday. It was a bad day and I was up at his house and he was talking to a friend. He said, "I can't make this trial balance; I cannot make a trial balance." I said, "I'll do it." He said, "Okay, sit down. I'll give you all the figures." It took me about an hour, but I made a trial balance. He couldn't get over it. He said something like, "You got some brains in that head."

Anyhow, I went out again and I was still going with other people. I never took him to a dance at school or anything. Never. I can't say I loved him, but I respected him tremendously. He was a really brilliant man. I learned to know him and really found out. I only went with college kids, You know, rah-rah boys--sorority and fraternity dances, college dances, Harvard game, and this is the only man that I knew that was solid. He was not like a frivolous kid. And so then I started to go with him.

I was also going with some young man from Cornell Law. Oh, I got a lot of proposals, usually didn't mean anything, but this fellow from Cornell said, "Before you ever, ever get engaged to anyone, promise me you'll tell me first." Because he had asked me, and I said my mother would kill me; not ready for it. And she would have too. But it was my husband (to-be)'s birthday, and I said, "What would you like for a birthday gift?" He said, "To get engaged to you." "Oh!" I said, "Forget it. My mother would kill me, and, besides, I don't love you." I said, "Anyway, I have to finish school, and I have a year and a half to go." He said, "I'll wait." "Well," I said, "I don't think so." He was so persistent. He would wait downstairs sometimes in front of my house before I went off to school with my father. He'd wait there and say, "Morning. Can I take you down now?" "No, I'm with my father." "My, you're really not nice." Father never said too much. He just said to me one thing, "If I were him, I would tell you what I would do. I'd drown you." I don't know what impelled me. I really don't.

But he was so damn persistent. I said, "I'll tell you--I'll get engaged to you for two different reasons, but you have to admit that you do or not do, okay? Number 1, as you remember, I have to finish school, and my mother has to say it's all right if I do it.

Number 2, I have too many dates 'til June; I've got to keep them." [Laughs.] He said, "Let's talk to your mother." I said, "How about the dates?" "Fair enough. Keep any date you want until June." Crazy!

Q: That is funny!

FARKAS: So we spoke to my mother and father; I'll never forget. My mother said, "She doesn't know what she's doing. She may be going on 19, but she's a child. She doesn't know anything." He said, "That's all right. We'll both grow up together." I heard my mother say, "I don't know if you could afford her. She's had everything." "Oh," he said, "I can afford her." And my mother said, "You know, I've given her everything; her father and I have. Not that she's spoiled, but she's used to a lot of things."

Well, anyway, to make a long story short, my mother said, "She's got to finish school. I'll tell you something, engaged or no-engaged, no dates during the week; Friday, Saturday, fine, Sunday; home 10 o'clock." She said, "You think you could adhere to that?" He said, "Yes, I can." I remember when we went down to get the ring, I asked Mother if she'd come. She said, "Oh, no."

Q: You asked your mother to come and help you pick out your engagement ring?

FARKAS: Yes. What did I know about a ring? My mother said, "I won't go." She said, "I'm not saying I don't like him, but I really don't think you know what you're doing. You have a year and a half in which to make up your mind. That's the only reason I said yes. But", she said, "I'm not going with you to pick the ring."

I'll never forget. I tell you, I didn't know much, but I knew one thing: I'd heard about marquise diamonds. I went down with him, I see this marquise diamond--it was so bright--and so, I said, "I think I'll take that one." It was a gorgeous diamond, a marquise diamond; had to be set. It's the best kind, perfect, perfect.

I told Mother about it, and she didn't pay much attention. Then the day I went down to get it I had a class from 4 to 6. I was free from 2 to 4, so he met me and we went down and we picked up the ring. Then I had to go back to class. I remember I went to class and I'd sit there--you know how you are: "Hey look, look." They said, "What's that?" I said, "Five and Ten." Nobody knew it was an engagement ring!

Q: [Laughs] Really?

FARKAS: They're kids. I never spoke about him. I used to go with the captain of the football team, Ed Morrows, or another one, and he never, never entered the picture. It's very funny. I'd never, never mentioned him. When I think of it now!

Q: You kept your worlds apart.

FARKAS: That's right. I had this ring, and I never wore it to school after that; my mother wouldn't allow me to. Anyway, to make a long story short, it was the Harvard-Columbia game, and my brothers and a couple of other young people were going up, and I was invited too. So I said to Mother, "I'm going to the Harvard-Columbia game." And Mother said, "Who are you going with?" "The boys and Percy Peck."

Mother said, "What do you mean, you're going with Percy Peck?" I said, "That's my date." Mother said, "I thought you were engaged." "I am, but one of the agreements we made was that I could keep my dates." And she said, "Really? Well, I want to tell you something. I think it's crazy altogether, but you mean to tell me that George Farkas will allow you, being his fiancée, to go to a football game and spend the night at Harvard? I know your brothers are there." I said, "yes." She said, "But I can't believe it." I said, "Mom, I'll call him on the phone and you can listen to the phone." This was Thursday, and I called him up.

Q: He knew nothing about this?

FARKAS: About the game?

Q: Yes, about you going to the game?

FARKAS: Yes, I'd told him. Oh, I told him I was keeping my dates. So I said, "George, you know I'm going to the Harvard-Columbia game?" He said, "I know. Not very happy about it." I said, "You know I'm going with Percy Peck?" He said, "I know." "Well, have a nice time." I said, "You don't mind?" He said, "I sure do, but an agreement's an agreement. I mind like hell, but I don't break my word." He said, "Who else is going?" I told him my brothers and all. "Well, have a great time. Where will you be that I can call you?" I said, "I don't know, 'cause after the game you go out." He said, "Okay. See you when you get back Sunday night."

Okay, so I hang up. Mother said, "Now, look, you might be impervious to his feelings, I don't know anything about it, but, young lady, either give back that ring, or you don't go to the game. Now you make up your mind. I've never heard of anyone being engaged and having dates. To me, you're both crazy." She said, "I never thought this thing would last." If she hadn't said that, I swear I might have never married him.

Q: Really?

FARKAS: I'm not kidding. But when she said, "I thought this was what was going to happen," I said, "Well, Mother, you've got me into this thing. I'm not going." She says, "You're not?" I said, "No." She says, "We'll see what happens when Friday comes." I said, "I'm not going." I told my brother and I called Percy Peck up. I said, "Percy, you know, I'm sort of engaged. I'm more or less, but sort of--"

Q: With a marquise diamond! I love it.

FARKAS: I said, "But I'm not going to the game." "Oh," he said, "why did you wait till the last minute?" I said, "Well, there are plenty of girls who would go at the last minute." Then I told Mother I wasn't going, and I called up my fiancée and I said, "George, I'm not going." He says, "You're not?" I said, "No." He said, "Let's go and celebrate Saturday night." Now, he worked late. He worked hard, and Saturday night, usually, he would leave the store about 8:30, 9 o'clock. He said, "I'll leave at 7 and pick you up." There was a very famous restaurant downtown; it begins with a D.

Q: Delmonico's?

FARKAS: Yes, right. He said, "We're going to Delmonico's for dinner; how's that? And then we'll dance." I said, "Fine." He was so happy, poor guy, that I didn't go. That's when Mother said, "Now that this is stopping, you're going to talk to him and tell him. This engagement does not hold if he thinks it's all right for you to date others."

So when he came over, Mother said, "George, I want to talk to you. I'm not used to this business. I don't approve of my daughter being engaged to you and going out with other young men. Do you go out with other girls?" "Oh," he says, "I wouldn't think of it. But a promise is a promise, Mrs. Lewis. I keep them, and I don't think it's fair to break it." My mother said, "You're not, I am, because if she goes out again, you're going to get your ring back. I tell you that right now."

I didn't do it; I really didn't. I decided, OKAY Well, we had the stormiest engagement anyone could have. The ring went back eight times.

Q: Did it? [Laughs]

FARKAS: It really did, but he wouldn't let go. He suddenly said to me one day, "You know, you'll marry nobody on this earth but me. I'm telling you that right now." Anyway, that's what happened.

Q: Well, that's a lovely story. So you married just a week--I mean, a month after you graduated?

FARKAS: Not even. I graduated on June 10th and I got married June 17th.

Q: Is that right? So, it was a week later.

FARKAS: Yes, and in that period I had a burst appendix. I was out of school for six weeks the last term. I never thought I'd make it, but I was a good student.

Q: Yes, you graduated with honors, didn't you?

FARKAS: Yes. I made it; that's all. But I remember we had a long honeymoon.

Q: Yes, a two and a half month one. I should think you'd get tired of living out of a suitcase.

FARKAS: Well, you see, I hadn't been to Europe before, but he had. In fact, his father, before the first World War, had made a lot of money here in the United States. His ambition was always to go back to Hungary, where he came from, and buy himself the chateau of a baron he knew who wanted to sell. And a coach--a white coach with four white horses. And he built two American bathrooms in the house. They used to call him the crazy American.

Q: Oh, he did buy the place?

FARKAS: Oh, yes. When my husband was not quite 13, or maybe a little older. He had four daughters. One was already married to a doctor here. The other one was engaged, but he said it made no difference. He took the other three and himself and his wife and my husband to Hungary. He was going to live there. He had bought this place before. By the time they were ready, it was all done.

It was in Pest. That's where they lived, and then when war broke out, he never thought the United States would go to war with Hungary--Austria or Hungary--so he kept on buying these Austrian/Hungarian bonds. Then, finally, when war broke out, every American citizen had to leave.

I remember my husband telling me that they had to go on this ship and his father didn't want to because it was second class. The government said, "You get on it." So they came back to the United States. Don't forget, most of his money was in Austrian/Hungarian bonds.

Q: He had given up his ties in the United States? His businesses?

FARKAS: No, he never gave up his citizenship.

Q: His businesses?

FARKAS: All except one building. Lucky. He held one building with a store in it that somebody ran, so they came back and he came back to this building and he started to manufacture women's coats and opened a store, and from there he went to four stores, five stores. He died of the flu. He was only 52.

Q: That World War I,--1918 type [of flu]?

FARKAS: Yes. He was 52 when he died. My husband said he had made as much money in that short period as he did in all the years that he worked before. He must have been quite a guy.

Q: He certainly must have been.

FARKAS: My husband took after his father. He had a brother who graduated from Stevens Institute, who was an engineer. He graduated while they were there, and he had won--he and another fellow one had won a prize for the design they did for some of the new bridges that were being changed over the Seine, and he came to visit them on his way to Paris. He was supposed to be a great swimmer, but something happened. He went into a fiord and he dove and he didn't come up. My husband was standing there, and he ran home to tell them. They couldn't find him for three days. It seems he must have hit a rock. The trouser got caught in a wire and that's how they found the body.

Q: Isn't that awful!

FARKAS: My mother-in-law never forgave my father-in-law for moving to Hungary, I'll tell you. She told me she never wanted to go; she hated it. She said, "I never, ever, forgave him."

Q: Because she lost her son.

FARKAS: I said, "Well, you're lucky, Mother, you have other children." She said, "If your thumb is off, you miss the thumb. If the small finger is off, you miss the finger. You don't have five. One does not make up for the other."

Q: That's right.

FARKAS: My husband wanted to be an engineer like his brother. He'd have been a good one, too.

Q: But that's why he was forced into the business?

FARKAS: Yes. If there was an older son, he would not have had to do it.

Q: So he had to do his college at night, then?

FARKAS: Yes, yes.

Q: What a lot of work!

FARKAS: Oh, my God! I used to go to class with him sometimes and take notes because he was so exhausted.

Q: I can imagine. He was running the business.

FARKAS: He went to Townsend Harris. You know Townsend Harris?

Q: Town--no.

FARKAS: Townsend Harris was a school for very, very bright students, and you had to be chosen to go. My brothers all went there.

Q: Did they? Well, was your husband born in the United States?

FARKAS: Oh, yes, all the family were born here.

Q: What happened to the place in Hungary? Lost it?

FARKAS: Lost it. That then became--I don't know--it became part of the State something or other. Who knows? I remember one thing he did do, though. When his brother was buried, somehow he was not buried in Budapest. He was buried in a cemetery that belonged to my husband's family, which then, eventually, became part of Romania.

I remember, years later, when we went to Hungary, my husband said to me, "I'm going to leave you here. I'm going to the place where my brother was buried. I promised my mother I would put a stone up over his grave if I could ever get there." And it was some job in that day, getting through and into Romania, but he did it. He did it. He promised his mother, and that was that!

Q: Was your husband the oldest boy?

FARKAS: No. He was the only son after his brother died. The brother was the oldest son, and he was next to the youngest. He was a good brother, I'll tell you that.

Q: Yes, I can imagine he was. Well, tell me about this honeymoon that was much too long. Where'd you go on it?

FARKAS: We started in the usual place, Paris. I'll never forget on the boat, Judge Hughes had the room next to us. This very dear friend of mine who I went to college with, who was part of the Guggenheim-Meyers family--

Q: Yes, the girl.

FARKAS: Her father was a very famous horticulturist. He owned all the land that's now called the Miracle Mile in Manhattan. That used to be one of the biggest horticultural settlements in this part of the country. He was a Palestinian, by the way. Her mother, of course, was American. He was the one who patented those colored sweet peas. You don't see too much of them any more. He was the first one to color flowers. Colored by nature, you know. I remember he used to say, "That's not the hand of God. That's the hand of man." Anyway, he sent his son down to our room on the boat and they put a lattice up. That place was just one big garden from ceiling to floor. You never saw anything like it. In the end it was awful, because the flowers started to have that terrible odor. But Hughes

came and said, "I have got to see this room." Everybody on the boat came to see the room. It was really beautiful.

Q: It must have been.

FARKAS: My husband was the lousiest sailor you ever did meet. The first night we had dinner, but after that he was sick, sick, sick. I don't think he got out of his room 'til the day we landed. Honest to God, I think he must have lost about ten pounds.

Q: How long was the crossing that time?

FARKAS: Eight days. Well, you could have had a six-day crossing, but he decided eight days. He wished he never did it. And then we landed. I think we landed in Germany.

I told you my brothers were great athletes, and one could have been in the Olympic Games in 1928, and Mother said, "Nothing doing; nothing doing." He was a broadjumper. Mother said, "I'll tell you what, though. We'll go to Holland. (That's where the games were.) And you can watch them, but that's it." She said to me, "Look, honey, if you don't feel well--(because I told you, I just had that operation) I want you to call me immediately." She told me the hotel they were at in Amsterdam.

Well, we get to Berlin; that's where we were first. And I'll never forget. You know, you have your honeymoon trousseau, and I got all the things you should get, I guess.

Q: And all the luggage you used to take!

FARKAS: Oh, God! You went with a trunk. I remember, I had a silver fox--I'd never had one before in my life; it was a swishy thing, and I remember we were at the Hotel Adlon, and my husband went to phone someone. He said, "Sit here, honey. I'll be right back." There was a man sitting there. When my husband left, he came over to my table and started to talk to me in German. I understood some, but not much, and I was annoyed. I moved away, and he moved nearer.

Just then, my husband came and said, "What's this?" I said, "I don't know. He just came." My husband said, "Get out of here fast." And the guy went away. Well, sometimes we'd walk on the street and the same thing. We'd see people--men--all these people--they'd sidle up to me. I said to him, "There's something wrong, darling; there's something wrong." We found out from the concierge: only hookers wore silver fox. I put the silver fox away.

Q: What a disappointment!

FARKAS: I didn't feel well. I really got sick in Berlin and my husband was worried, so he called my parents, and, of course, mother and father and my brother came to Berlin. My brother was ripping mad. He said he'd like to kill me, but it wasn't my fault. So we were

in Berlin for a bit and he met a lovely girl that he liked. You know that age; he was 22, 23. Well, when it was time to leave Berlin, I was feeling better and my folks said, "Let's go." Mother said, "We'll take a boat down the Rhine or whatever you want." But he was mad as hell. "First, you pull me from Amsterdam, then you pull me from Berlin. I met this girl--" blah-blah. Well, he wasn't too interested.

We took this trip down the Rhine, and I was feeling better, and my husband said, "Come on. We're going to Switzerland. Why don't you?" And my mother said, "All right." So my mother and my father and my brother and myself and my husband went to Switzerland. We stayed at Luzern, at the Palace Hotel. The Olympic team came into the Palace Hotel in Luzern, and I knew a lot of them from my brother: Percy Peck--

Q: Oh, Percy Peck was back.

FARKAS: Yes, and a couple of others. I was getting mad because I wasn't allowed to do anything. My brother and my husband would get up in the morning, run out, play tennis, go swimming, and I would spend the morning with my mother and father, walking here, walking there. Oh, I was sick and tired of the whole damn thing. I said to my husband: "You came on this honeymoon with my brother." He said, "I didn't ask him to come along, you know." I said, "Yes, but you're playing tennis with him and swimming at midnight--" I took off my wedding band and I said, "I'm going to throw it right away," which I did. I threw it away.

Q: Naughty girl.

FARKAS: Yes, I know. And I couldn't find it. Anyway, I said to my mother the next day, "Mother, I'm feeling better, really." She says, "I'm dying to get away from you and George. It's time that we were in Paris."

Q: She could sense the tensions, of course.

FARKAS: She says, "Your brother is no help." So we left them. We picked them up in Paris. We had a great time though, otherwise. Really, we had a great time.

Q: Were you excited by your first views of Paris?

FARKAS: Yes, oh, yes. I read a lot about it and my husband knew an awful lot about it.

Q: And you knew the language, of course.

FARKAS: Yes, so it was lots of fun. I'll never forget the first time I went to Vienna to visit the Schönbrunn Palace and saw all those carriages. Just fascinating.

Q: Did you go to Italy?

FARKAS: Yes. We only went to Florence, that's all. The reason we went to Florence was that my husband had some business there. He used to buy in Europe, mostly London, Germany.

Q: How did you like Germany?

FARKAS: I liked it. I liked it very much.

Q: Of course, this was pre-Hitler.

FARKAS: Yes, and you know, Munich is superb. Bavaria, Frankfurt, Cologne--all those.

Q: Had you already started your interest in art? Obviously, you have a great interest, and your husband did, I understand.

FARKAS: I love it. My mother was an avid antiques collector, and when I was getting over feeling ill, we had more fun going with her to these places, you know.

Q: When you came back from your honeymoon, where did you and your husband settle down?

FARKAS: Well, my parents had given us money for furniture and linen and what not, but my husband was opening what is presently Alexander's and needed all the money he could get, and he said to me, "Could we use that money that your parents gave us for furniture and supplies to put in the business? I said, "Yes. They don't care what I do with it." He said, "I'll give it back to you."

So I gave him that and we moved into the first hotel/apartment on 75th Street between the Drive and West End Avenue. In fact, it was the house next door to the Ochs family. It was new. You got everything, just like a hotel. That's where we moved for the first two years. It was good for me, too, 'cause it didn't take a lot of time to keep it. I was going to school at the time.

Q: It would be a very good way for a young bride to begin.

FARKAS: Well, I went to school, and he worked so hard--16-18 hours. It used to get me down. I used to spend an awful lot of time at my parents' home because I used to eat there.

Q: You were working for your M.A. at Columbia at that time?

FARKAS: Yes.

Q: So you started back to school--

FARKAS: Right away.

Q: Did you go full-time?

FARKAS: Oh, full-time.

Q: And what was your Master's in? It's a Master of arts, I see.

FARKAS: Yes. A very interesting thing. I went really for further study in languages, going into literary things of French and Spanish.

One of the professors had a sign up on his door, "Wanted, student who can write and speak Spanish fluently." I figured, "That's me." My husband was busy, you know, so I went and I applied.

His name was Professor Wilson; he was some distant relation to President Wilson. Charming guy. He was studying the education of women in South America, especially Peru, Colombia, and I forget what other country he was studying. So I worked with him; did a lot of research.

Q: Sort of a graduate assistant type?

FARKAS: Yes. And then he got a grant to go to stay in Peru and Colombia for a while. (Now, I didn't change my name, by the way. I stayed Lewis. My husband didn't mind that.) He said to me, "Miss Lewis, I just got a grant and I can take you, and I'd be very appreciative if you'd come because you've worked with me so much now that you know exactly where we're heading."

"Oh, no," I said, "I can't possibly."

He said, "Why?" (I didn't wear my wedding ring.) I said, "'Cause I'm married." "Married! What was your maiden name?" I said, "Lewis." "Well, that's the name you have." I said, "I didn't change it." He said, "Where's your wedding band?" I said, "I don't wear it." He said, "Are you fooling?" I said, "No."

He didn't know who my husband was. He said, "Well, if your husband's in the academic field, maybe we can manage something." I said, "He's not."

He said, "Do you think he'd agree?" I said, "No, he won't. I'm positive he wouldn't." Of course, my husband said, "Absolutely not." I don't blame him. So I told Dr. Wilson I couldn't, but I changed my major from languages to sociology.

Q: Through his influence.

FARKAS: Yes. I came to see cultural values in the things that make people tick in our culture, and that's why I say he really was an influence in my life.

Q: So that's how you really started.

FARKAS: Yes, through him, really. Through him, I would say, I was interested in people, and through my own mother.

Q: At that time, that was a rather daring thing to do, not to use your husband's name.

FARKAS: I know, but I did.

Q: That was just you.

FARKAS: That was me.

Q: Do you any of your friends do that?

FARKAS: No.

Q: And I'm certain your mother didn't.

FARKAS: No. No, she didn't. But I told my husband, "You know, all my work's been done under my name, so--" He said, "Keep it. I don't care. If it makes you happy, do it."

Q: Socially, you were Mrs. Farkas, and as far as anything academic, you were Miss Lewis?

FARKAS: Yes, right.

Q: It still was a pretty daring thing to do.

FARKAS: Yes, I know. That's why everything I wrote was under the name of Ruth *Lewis* Farkas, and that's why I always kept it that way. My husband said it didn't make any difference to him. I was me; that's what he married.

Q: Yes, that's what he wanted. Well, now, you got your master's degree in 1932.

FARKAS: Yes.

Q: And you've got to go now.

Q: We were talking yesterday about your master's. That was in sociology. Now, were you able to continue using your work? I know you were sort of a graduate assistant, but, at some point here you started having your four sons.

FARKAS: Well, between times I did things. One of the things was, I made a study for the Jewish Federation for Philanthropies. That's where I did about finding out how many Jewish people were on the rolls, on welfare. Jewish families, you know, never used to go to welfare. They used to be helped out by other Jewish people. Then I did a study on male/female roles in marriage, and then I did another one on aging. I think that was 1973.

Q: For whom do you do that? An academic group?

FARKAS: Yes. The one on aging, I did for--let me see, what group? It was something for Mental Health. I got an award for mental health, you know. I don't if it's in there or not. I forget. [Refers to entry about her in *Who's Who*.]

Q: There are so many here. Taking these awards chronologically--

FARKAS: That was mental health I got in 1979, I think.

Q: Can you remember when you did the study of how many Jewish people were on welfare?

FARKAS: Yes, I think that was in 1969 or 1970.

Q: Your four sons were born in 1930, '33, '38 and '48?

FARKAS: Right.

Q: I see that you went back to the university for a doctorate quite a while after you had an M.A. and were working. What exactly influenced you to go back and get a doctorate?

FARKAS: Why? Well, as you know, even though I'm a sociologist, I was interested in social work, and also in agencies, on national welfare, the National Association of Social Welfare Agencies. I went to one of their board meetings because I was on the board, and there was a review of what was happening in a lot of the agencies. One of the young women got up and said something and I said, "I disagree with you entirely."

She said, "Well, you know, it's not unusual for people who do not really know the role of social work not to understand how we do things." And I said, "My dear young lady, I understand well. I might have taught a course that you think I know nothing about." I got that kind of look that you get from some of these students sometimes. You know, "What are you, just a volunteer something or other."

I went home and I said to my husband, "I'm sick and tired of being on these boards and getting this back-talk from some of these young people who have no experience at all." He said, "You want to be heard? Well then, you have to just go back and get your doctorate and that will settle it." I said, "You're right." So, back I went. When I first went

back, the head of my doctoral division, Dr. Harvey Zorbaugh (he wrote *The Slum and the Gold Coast*, that very famous book), said to me, "You know what, I think before you actually get into your studies, you could give courses. Why don't you teach?"

So I taught from 1946, and then I stopped to have my son in 1948 and then I went back again in 1949, and I taught until 1955 when I stopped because I was writing my doctoral thesis.

Q: I see. And this was at NYU you were teaching?

FARKAS: Yes.

Q: Specifically, what courses did you teach?

FARKAS: Familial Values--Changing and Cultural Familial Values and Acceptances of Cultural Values for Health and Medicine; those were the two courses I taught.

Q: Getting back to the personal level, you must have had help in the home quite a bit, didn't you?

FARKAS: I had the same governess for 26 years. Well, her sister was my first governess, and when she was getting married, my oldest child was three and I was pregnant with my second, and so she said, "I'm going to put off my marriage until my sister is ready to leave her job, which will be in a few months." So then I got the sister and she was with me for 26 years. Those were the only two I ever had.

Q: Good for the boys, too. It gave them continuity.

FARKAS: Continuity, sure.

Q: In your Who's Who writeup, there is an entry that you did personnel consultant work for Alexander's, as well?

FARKAS: Right. I was their first personnel consultant.

Q: And you also are Director and a member of the Executive Committee? And then at some point you and your husband went down to Florida, and it wasn't only your husband who was busy there; you were President of Dolma Realty Corporation?

FARKAS: Yes.

Q: How in the world did you get into real estate?

FARKAS: Because my husband was interested in real estate. My mother was always in real estate.

Q: I see. So, you and your mother did the same thing?

FARKAS: Yes.

Q: You found you knew a lot about it already, I suppose?

FARKAS: Well, I learned a lot. What I didn't know, I learned.

Q: Did you enjoy real estate?

FARKAS: Very much. I enjoyed it but, you know, it took a lot of time from the things I really enjoyed doing. I also was head of a thing called Birchall Land.

Q: Birchall Land? What is that?

FARKAS: That had to do with different land. The name was Birchall because I lived on Birchall Drive in Scarsdale.

Q: So you and your husband were very busy, and all of the things you did were preparing you- -though you didn't know it at the time--because they all had to do with dealing with people, didn't they?

FARKAS: Prepared me very well for trying to keep budgets in place. You know why I say that?

Q: No.

FARKAS: Because when I came to Luxembourg and asked to look over the budget of the previous year and saw things that never had been spent, I said to John Hollingsworth, my administrative counselor, "Look, we don't need as much money as they give us." And I was advised, "Don't send any back, because once you send it back, you'll never get it again." I said, "Well, I'm sending it back." I sent back \$10,000. Never got a thank you for it, but I sent it back. But then, a year later, when Mr. Kissinger wanted to come with some men and we needed more space, and I was going to partition some of the office off for them, I asked for some money and they wouldn't give it to me. I did it to myself. It was like *deja vu*: "I told you not to do it."

Q: Yes, I can just hear John.

FARKAS: He was right.

Q: Well, he'd been in the government enough years to know.

FARKAS: Yes, he was. I wasn't used to seeing--

Q: You thought it worked like business.

FARKAS: Yes. I learned a lot. What we could say? You don't know! I'm telling you, on the sensible things, you can't get anything.

I got some furniture in there that I never even ordered. Somebody ordered it. Kingdon Gould must have ordered it; I don't know. When it came, I said, "What's it for?" We didn't even have room to put it. You know what? I put it up in my residence, on the fourth floor. I never saw it again.

Q: Is that right?

FARKAS: I didn't need it; I just didn't need it. Couldn't get your money back.

Q: For the record, would you review the story of Lyndon Johnson and Costa Rica? How you happened to be in the situation where it came up, that he offered you the post?

FARKAS: Well I was there at the time when the public members were going over the different ambassadorial resumés, and there was a problem with one of the ambassadors to Costa Rica. The problem had to do, I think, with some kind of beef that Costa Rica was asked to have, and also something with hybrid corn, and our government, of course, was supposed to buy it. And at this particular time, our President decided that we didn't need it. I don't know; they said that the beef wasn't up to standard--I don't know. All I know was that Ambassador Boonstra was so damn upset. President Johnson asked me, "What do you think?", because I'd known about it. I knew Boonstra and I knew what happened. I told him what I thought, and he said, "That's a wise sort of advice and a good decision." Then he said to me, "I wonder what kind of an ambassador you would make." And I said, "Try me." I never realized that he would designate me. He sent my resumé to Costa Rica and they accepted me. I told him I couldn't go because my husband had had a heart attack.

Q: This was after agrément?

FARKAS: Yes.

Q: You were a public member, were you, of the Foreign Service Selection Board at that time?

FARKAS: Yes.

Q: And you still are?

FARKAS: I'm vice chairman of the Public Members Association of the Foreign Service. I've been the vice chairman now for three years.

Q: You've been on that committee for a good long time, haven't you?

FARKAS: Yes.

Q: Your husband had a heart attack. And at that time you thought, "Well, that's it; I won't be going to any more embassies."

FARKAS: And that's fine.

Q: After that, what happened? You came back and you kept on with your various New York activities?

FARKAS: I spoke before a public group; I don't remember exactly what it was-- something that had to do with government. One of the men who heard me said to me, "I think that you would make one great ambassador. I think I should introduce you to some senators. Perhaps they should know you." I met them and then forgot about the whole damn thing, as you do you know; you have other problems.

There was a law in our firm that you didn't give money to any presidential campaigns. Ever since Wendell Willkie, I think.

Q: Oh, is that so?

FARKAS: Well, my husband was very fond of Wendell Willkie, and it's the first man that he ever stumped for or advocated to be a President. Of course, Willkie, as you know, didn't make it. He died soon after.

Q: Yes, I know.

FARKAS: My husband was heartbroken when he died. My husband thought a great deal of Richard Nixon. He agreed with him very, very much on a lot of things. He had retired, and he said to me, "You know, I'm free now. I can do as I *damn* please. I don't have to answer to any body for what I give." So that was when he offered to give, I think it was \$350,000, for Nixon's campaign.

I told you about New York University closing down the School of Social Work? I was in Europe when it happened, and I flew to New York, and Jim Hester said, "We need a million-and-something dollars. How do you want to raise it?" This was in early August. "How are you going to raise it by October?"

I said, "We'll do it, because that school shouldn't be closed down," and he said, "Well, all right. If you want to do it, we'll help you; we'll try." We got several men together and each decided to put in \$300--something--\$325,000.

Q: You were chairman of this group to raise it?

FARKAS: Well, I at that time was head of the President's Council, which had to do with the School of Social Work, and was responsible to the president of the university.

Q: Okay.

FARKAS: My husband was in Hawaii at the time, just coming back from Japan, or going--I forget. He traveled all over the world, as you know. I got hold of him in Hawaii. I said, "Honey, we need \$300-something-thousand dollars." He said, "You do?" I said, "Yup."

"Well," he said, "Honey, you know we've promised something to Nixon's campaign, and you know me; I never go back on my word." I said, "I know, but, Honey, this is more important than anything that's going to happen. The president can live without our money."

He says, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll call up Maurice Stans and tell him the problem and tell him, 'Look, we'll give you \$175,000 before January and the rest after, because I don't want to lose a lot of income that I get from my bonds.'" And Stans said, "That's perfectly all right. We're having enough, so don't worry about it." So that's how I gave the money to the school and saved the school. Have a plaque in Palm Beach. It says, "Thank you for saving our lives."

Q: I should think they might.

FARKAS: So what happened was, when I gave the first check to Mr. Stans, I went with this Congressman Wyman, who was at that time in the House of Representatives. Great guy. He was 20 years in the House of Representatives.

Q: What state?

FARKAS: New Hampshire. He's a very nice man. There was one thing he said and I'll never forget it. Stans said, "You don't expect anything for this?" And Wyman said, "She expects nothing. She's giving it because her husband wants to do it, and he's not well so she's giving it. As you realize, because of what's she's doing, she cannot give you the whole full check." Stans said, "That's all right, we're having money coming in." And that was that. So that was fine, and the school stayed open.

When I was designated first to be the ambassador, I said to my husband, "I really don't want to go." I really didn't want to go because I had a sister-in-law who was born in Brussels. She's from the Dautement family, probably one of the oldest wealthy families in Belgium. She said to me, "Ruth, bad climate for George."

And so I said, "Honey, I don't want to go."

He said, "The President has designated you. You didn't say no to the designation. You can't change your mind now. You can't make a fool of other people." I said, "It's not being a fool." He said, "You go. You accepted, you go. I'll be with you as much as I can." So I said all right.

Then I went before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and as I was answering questions there, a note came in. I forgot who headed that at the time.

Q: Well, it was Fulbright for years and years.

FARKAS: I think it was Fulbright. I guess it was, because when I first came, Fulbright said to me, "It's nice to know that we hope to have an ambassador with your background who's capable of carrying on."

Anyway, comes this note which said that my husband gave \$375,000 to the campaign--\$175,000, or whatever. I guess it was \$350,000; \$175,000 before the election and \$175,000 after the election. "Was that to buy an ambassadorship?" I really got mad.

Q: They asked you that publicly?

FARKAS: Yes. Somebody sent the note in and then they asked me the question. And what was it that old Sam Ervin said to me? "I guess Alexander's must have had a good Christmas." I said, "They always have a good Christmas."

Q: That was a nasty thing to say, wasn't it? Unnecessary thing to say.

FARKAS: Well, I can tell you, when they get nasty, they get nasty. Then Senator Percy said, "I think we have to think about this and take it into consideration."

I said, "Why? While you're at it, Senator Percy, why don't you take into consideration what we gave this year--\$1.5 million to one hospital, a couple of hundred thousand dollars to another university, built a hospital for the aging." I said, "That \$350,000, while it's a lot of money, does not compare with what was given to charitable purposes?" I was mad.

Q: And why shouldn't you give money to a campaign if you want to?

FARKAS: Well, they figured it was an awful lot. And another thing, you see, we had never given before, because of the problem with Wendell Willkie. Because the day my husband came out for Willkie, we were picketed. You know, there's always this group that's anti: "Don't Buy in Alexander's. They're just Republicans." And never mind how much good they do in the community. So that's when my husband said to our top executives, "No more. That settles it. While you work for this company, there'll be no more politicking."

Q: But at the time of Nixon, he was no longer Chairman of the Board.

FARKAS: At Nixon's second campaign.

Q: So this is the '72 campaign, because you went in '73.

FARKAS: Yes, right.

Q: And by that time, you really had lost your enthusiasm to go.

FARKAS: By that time I really didn't want it, and I couldn't care less. I said to my husband, "Now I'm not going. I'm sure I'm not going." He said, "Look, honey, if you don't go, then you're guilty, and if you do go, you're guilty. Just face the facts." I said, "That's it?" And he said, "You're big enough to face facts. Whatever people say, whatever they want to say, that's all right with me. I'm with you, and that's that." So I went.

Q: Going back, how did you happen to be selected to serve as public member for the Foreign Service? How did people know about your interest?

FARKAS: Well, I was on President Johnson's Program for the Handicapped.

Q: Ah-ha, that's it. You were on Johnson's--okay. So it was really through President Johnson?

FARKAS: Yes, right, right.

Q: You knew him personally?

FARKAS: Yes. But I wasn't a Democrat.

Q: No, I know you're not. What sort of man was he?

FARKAS: I liked him. I mean, you know, politically maybe not a lot of things, but personally, I thought he was a really very feeling person. No matter what anyone said, I felt that. I met him through a man by the name of Harry Fishback, who was head of Fishback and Moore; that's the biggest electrical company in the United States, one of the biggest in the world. Harry Fishback knew Johnson, and we were invited to the White House through Harry Fishback, and that's how I got to know Johnson.

Q: So this was nothing that came out of the blue?

FARKAS: No.

Q: But the Senate Foreign Relations Committee didn't take any of that into consideration?

FARKAS: No. They didn't care to know how many languages I knew--nothing.

Q: They didn't ask any of that?

FARKAS: No.

Q: Your languages, or what you knew about European politics, or NATO?

FARKAS: No. No, no, no, no.

Q: Is that right? Strictly on this money angle?

FARKAS: That's right. When that note came in, everything else stopped. Then when I left that and they said they had to think about it, there were a bunch of reporters outside. "What happened?" "How about it?" "Did you buy the job?" "Blah-blah-blah." I kept on saying, "No comment. No comment, no comment." I wouldn't talk.

Q: Yes, you handled yourself very, very well.

FARKAS: I just refused to get in any argument with them, that's all. And then this poor guy Wyman, who was a representative and was running for senator, Senator Cotton's seat really--they got him into a lot of trouble. They accused--they didn't actually accuse--they wanted to say that he did that so he could be running for the Senate. They never accused him technically because they never got to him.

Q: He was running for Norris Cotton's seat?

FARKAS: Yes. that's right, and he sort of got it, you know,

Q: Yes, I know he did.

FARKAS: But you know what happened?

Q: No.

FARKAS: They said that the count was wrong and he said he wanted another election or a count, and they wouldn't allow him to have it. They put the election ballots in a garage, or something, and when they took them out, some of them had blown away. It was a whole horrible deal. He never got the seat (Louis Wyman (R) was defeated by John Durkin (D).. Oh, it was awful. I felt so sorry for him; I almost felt I had ruined him. Not that I did. It was horrible.

Q: Yes. Well, Percy said, "We'll have to think about this," so that ended that day. Would you pick it up after that and tell me what happened after you went back?

FARKAS: No, I didn't bother.

Q: You didn't bother? It just went through?

FARKAS: I just said, "Do what you darn please; I couldn't care less."

Q: So you didn't go back any more?

FARKAS: No. I didn't. Well, then later, I guess it was March, they called me back again and told me that I had passed the Senate Foreign Relations and they'd like to brief me. If I ever felt that I didn't want to do anything, it was that.

Q: This was the State Department that called you back?

FARKAS: Yes.

Q: Incidentally, when you were testifying before the Senate, did the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) speak for you or against you?

FARKAS: No, no.

Q: They didn't run against you, then?

FARKAS: No, they never said anything there.

Q: Okay. Tell me about the briefing. How did they prepare you for the job?

FARKAS: Well, I went to the different desks--European desks, you know, and economic also. I think the Legal Division, too. Then whether you know the cultural things and what-not, and the state of Luxembourg and some of its interests. They also told me what they would like for me to do while I was there.

Q: How long did this last?

FARKAS: The briefing?

Q: The briefing. About a week?

FARKAS: No, no, no. I insisted upon a better briefing than that. I had about a two-and-a-half-week briefing.

Q: Did you? Because this was before the Ambassadors' course was set up.

FARKAS: I know, but I wanted to know, first of all, about the economics of Luxembourg; what its situation was in the EEC, and so forth and so on, and I wanted to

know more about NATO because there were a few people in NATO who were responsible to me, so I didn't want to go over and not know what I was talking about. I had a good briefing.

Q: Good. Now tell me about your swearing-in ceremony. Where did you have that done, and who swore you in?

FARKAS: In the State Department.

Q: Up on the eighth floor of the State Department, in that beautiful room there?

FARKAS: Right.

Q: You had a large audience did you, at the time?

FARKAS: Oh, there were a lot of people there.

Q: Anybody (in the State Department) can go, but you have the right to invite--

FARKAS: I didn't invite very many people. My family was so damn angry that they--

Q: Well, you know, I don't blame them.

FARKAS: And I said, "To heck with the whole business." My sons, of course, were there with their wives, my grandchildren, and my brothers, but that's all. I didn't invite another soul.

Q: Did you have a reception after?

FARKAS: A friend of mine who lives in Washington had a reception for me.

Q: At her house?

FARKAS: At their home; they live in Washington. That was the time David Kreeger was so sweet. The Kennedy Center was said to be having a big reception that night, and he was president of the Center, and he came to this party and he said, "Ruth Farkas, you're not going to be an ambassador without me coming first and saying, 'Lucky us.'" It was very sweet of him.

I forget the name of the young man who was mainly busy with briefing me. He went to Botswana. Excellent. Oh, and who was that man who was so active in the Middle East? He was called by Nixon, by Johnson, to try to do something about the Middle East problem. I think his name was something with an "S" (Refers to Joseph Sisco, then Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East and South Asia.). You know, I don't remember names.

Q: It's very hard to remember, especially after a time. So you prepared yourself to go over to Luxembourg. You requested a good briefing on the politics, et cetera. How much briefing did you actually get on the nuts and bolts of running an embassy? Or did they figure that you knew?

FARKAS: I got nothing out of it [as to] nuts and bolts.

Q: Did they tell you what your rights were? The people that you yourself could hire?

FARKAS: Yes, they told me that if I wanted to keep the chief minister [Deputy Chief of Mission], I could. Anybody I wanted not to keep I could let go. They told me that.

Q: Apparently they don't always.

FARKAS: Well, I asked.

Q: Part of it is knowing what to ask, isn't it? So you went out there and you decided to keep the people as they were?

FARKAS: Well, no. I didn't keep Galanto (Fred Galanto, Foreign Service officer, was deputy chief of mission upon Mrs. Farkas' arrival at Luxembourg.) for long.

Q: No, but he was due for a transfer anyway, wasn't he?

FARKAS: Well, he really would have liked to stay because his children were in school there and everything, but I figured that he was so directed by Kingdon Gould, who was before me, that I didn't think it was wise.

Q: He was still trying to run things the way Gould had done it?

FARKAS: Yes.

Q: Can you give me an example?

FARKAS: Well, let me see. A certain telegram came, and I don't know where I was. I wasn't out of the country, but I was some place in another city. It wasn't important, but, on the other hand, I didn't think that he had the right to do it. He answered it.

Q: He did? No, of course, he didn't [have the right].

FARKAS: And I told him, "Don't you ever dare do that again. I'm the responsible party here." I said, "Not that what you did is so wrong, but the fact of the matter was that it could have been wrong."

Q: Well, yes.

FARKAS: And he'd better know that: "I'm the Ambassador now and you're no longer the chief here." So that's when I decided that maybe it was best to change.

Q: He had been chargé for a while, hadn't he?

FARKAS: Oh, yes. He was chargé for a good bit. You know, it's a difficult thing. He didn't know me, didn't know my abilities--or disabilities, for that matter, and so I guess he figured, "Well, maybe I'd just as well answer the thing." So I was a little bit miffed.

Q: I don't blame you. This was early on, I gather?

FARKAS: In the beginning.

Q: Well, now I want to ask you something, because this is the thing that I didn't know about before. Some of the people like yourself, who have come in from other careers, have told me there's a sort of patronizing air that the FSOs use toward what they called "non-career." Did you run into that?

FARKAS: I'll tell you with whom. Disappointingly, Joan Clark (career foreign service officer, at that time was Executive Director of the Bureau of European Affairs. She later served as Ambassador to Malta, as Director General of the Foreign Service.).

Q: Did you? With Joan Clark? And what were the circumstances of that?

FARKAS: Well, she was the one who directed you to the embassy, I think; I forget exactly. I had lunch with her once or twice, but I never could get really *to* her, never, and I always felt that: "Kind of keep your distance." And you know, she was the one who should really have been doing the briefing, too, at the time. She eventually became an ambassador to some place.

Q: That's right. Currently, she's the Assistant Secretary for Consular affairs.

FARKAS: Is she?

Q: Yes, she's got one of the big jobs. She's done extremely well.

FARKAS: I understand that she's very capable.

Q: Yes, so I've heard.

FARKAS: She's probably a very nice person, but I just could never warm up to her. She's an impersonal person. Maybe her job makes her that way. I don't know.

Q: I met her only once, when she agreed to do an oral history.

Among the staff that you had there, did you ever feel--

FARKAS: You mean, in Luxembourg?

Q: Yes. Did you ever feel that any of them were regarding you as though you were an outsider?

FARKAS: No. I had wonderful rapport with all of them.

Q: Oh, I know John and Renate (Hollingsworth) think the world of you.

FARKAS: Well, what I would do, and lot of ambassadors never do, I invited them to dinner every once in a while. Let their hair down, talk to each other, talk to me. You know, I'm a person, they're persons. I think it was very helpful. And even with the Marines, I went to their place a few times and had lunch or dinner with them. After all, they were youngsters, and their parents' sons. I have sons.

Q: How did you see your mission as the President's personal representative? What were your goals when you took on this job?

FARKAS: Well, first of all, I was asked to see if there's a way that we could have Luxembourg importing from the United States, and inasmuch as my husband was in the department store business, and knowing a lot about import/export, and looking at some of the things they had and the prices--because Luxembourg had very high prices even then--I thought there was a way that they could really go to the United States and learn about some of the things that we could send them. I tried. I had some of the merchants at my home.

Q: Did they have a Board of Trade there, that sort of thing? Do they have organizations such as we do?

FARKAS: No.

Q: They don't have anything like that?

FARKAS: No. You know, it's not a big country.

Q: Sure, but it's quite wealthy, isn't it?

FARKAS: I would say it's a very comfortable country. There's no terrific wealth and there's no poverty.

Q: They could import?

FARKAS: Yes. They did import a lot of things. You know, they're known for their steel. They have one of the biggest steel mills--Arbed--and things like that, but they didn't make clothing or shoes. Those were all imported.

Q: From France, mostly?

FARKAS: France, Spain, different countries, but I could see that they had nothing from the United States, and we could have done a lot with them. I once asked my husband to help me, and he said, "I have nothing to do with your job." I did have a meeting, though, of the top merchants in Luxembourg. I told them that we would be very happy to help them go to the United States, and go to the Department of Commerce, and be directed to some of our best manufacturers and purchasing offices, and, sorry to say, Commerce didn't do anything.

Q: Commerce dropped the ball?

FARKAS: They didn't do anything. What happened was, one of them [Luxembourgers] came to me and said, "You know, I was in the United States and I saw some wonderful leather coats in Alexander's. Where did you get them?" I said, "I really don't know where we get them."

So I said to my husband, "Would you do me a favor just once, and talk to them at the residence?" "Well," he said, "only once."

So they came, and he said, "Look, we buy from all over the world. If you want to come to our buying office, we'll try to direct you for the things you want. We don't go any further than that. We'll be as helpful as we can." So, about 12 of them went. They had to go to our office and they directed them where to get things that they wanted in the United States.

Q: Through Alexander's?

FARKAS: Our buying office did it for them.

Q: I mean, it wasn't the government.

FARKAS: No, no. Our buyers didn't want to bother with it; they had their own problems, you know. So they would send them to purchasing offices that had nothing to do with us at all. They'd say, "Look, these people know about leather coats, these people know about shoes," and so forth.

Q: So, did they eventually--

FARKAS: They bought quite a few things, through the different purchasers. It had nothing to do with Commerce.

Q: Who was doing your commercial work at the embassy? Did you have a Commercial Attaché?

FARKAS: Economic Counselor.

Q: Who was that?

FARKAS: It was [Stephen] Lande. Then he was sent to Geneva. He's a brilliant young man, by the way.

Q: Is he?

FARKAS: Yes, I would have taken him into our business in a minute, but he was sold on the government; wouldn't change. Capable as all come.

Q: Did you select your second DCM after [Galanto]?

FARKAS: I sure did, yes.

Q: How did you go about that?

FARKAS: I spoke to some people I knew in France who were partially in government; not political, but knew what was going on in the world. And then I spoke to somebody I knew in Belgium through my sister-in-law's family, and I finally decided on a young man. He was terrific. At that time, he was principal officer in Lyon.

I didn't ask anybody [in the Department] about him; just what I gleaned for myself. I had him come to see me, and I liked him. I liked his ideas, I liked his viewpoints; a clean-looking young guy. And I took him on. They offered me somebody else first. Forget it.

Q: Did they send you a list to let you pick people from?

FARKAS: Yes, but I didn't want them.

Q: You didn't do that; you got your own?

FARKAS: I figured I'd use my own list and my head. He was with me for two and a half years, I guess; I think it was that. He was--I'm just trying to think--he was everything you would want. Spoke French beautifully. He had gone to the Sorbonne for awhile. His father originally was with Macy's, if I'm not mistaken--one of those department stores--so we could speak the same language in a certain way. I would write my own reports, you know. Sometimes if I'd want to write a report to the government that I felt was more than [narrow] political [reporting], I would say, "Peter, just go over this," and he always did very well. He was really good.

Then what happened was, Mr. Kissinger decided to send one of his young men that had been with him for a while and wanted to be an attaché and wanted to be under me in Luxembourg. He'd heard I was a good ambassador to work for, because I worked with my people--not as a top-notch ambassador, but as somebody who was part of a team, and I told them that. I said, "You know, even though I'm ambassador, everybody has to have a head of every firm, [but] we're all working together and nobody's trying to compete." I don't know, but I think we had a pretty good team; we really did.

Q: Well, so I gather. What happened?

FARKAS: Well, what happened was that on account of Kissinger, I had to let him go. Kissinger was going to put this . . .

Q: Was his name Tarnoff, by the way? Peter Tarnoff?

FARKAS: Yes. Peter Tarnoff. Oh, he was good. Finally, Vance took him on.

Q: Vance took Tarnoff?

FARKAS: Yes. He worked for Vance for some little time.

Q: I had heard--I wondered if you kept in touch with Tarnoff, because I understood that he became disillusioned with the system.

FARKAS: He was, and what happened was awful. I wrote in his resumé that he could very capably run an embassy. No doubt.

Q: How did you handle efficiency reports? Did you have your DCM do the draft?

FARKAS: No. I did those myself.

Q: You did all of it?

FARKAS: I never let them do it, because, you know, there's certain things you see in a person and the other one doesn't, just like correcting a paper for a student. I mean, he may be expressing himself in a way that a person just reading would say, "He doesn't know what he's talking about," but I knew what his ideas were, so I would say, "Nothing doing. I correct papers." And the same thing with that. Nobody ever wrote a report for me. That was taboo.

Q: How many efficiency reports did you do? Did you do all of your principal officers?

FARKAS: Yes.

Q: And your secretary?

FARKAS: And my secretary, yes.

Q: Tell me about her.

FARKAS: Oh, she was great.

Q: What was her name?

FARKAS: Louise [Farnus]. My social secretary [was] Miriam Zigrand. She was great. I still keep in touch with her.

Q: Was that somebody you hired--your social secretary?

FARKAS: Yes, I hired Zigrand myself. Kingdon Gould left me a very lovely young lady, but I like a goer, a doer--somebody very alive--and Kingdon's girl was a lovely lady, very gentle, but I felt: "Never mind gentle; I need someone more alive," so I got this Zigrand.

Q: Was she a Foreign Service secretary, or was this somebody you brought in completely from the outside?

FARKAS: She was not American. Not American Foreign Service. She was terrific. She knew everybody. Her mother was from Belgium, her father was a Luxembourger. She was living in Luxembourg. Her mother was a descendent of one of the [noble] families of Luxembourg. She had a fine background. She went to the University after that. I think she went to Montpellier.

After I let this girl go, from Gould, I got a very lovely lady from Virginia. I think her name was Virginia, too, and she was about to retire. She told me when she came that she was going to be doing it. I said, "That's all right." I said I'd rather have her ability for a short time than not." So she was with me for about seven months. She was very good. And then I got Louise. Well, she was excellent, and I tell you, she used to work.

Q: Did you ever have any women officers working for you?

FARKAS: Yes, I had one downstairs that had to do with passports and things like that, and I had another one who had to do with auditing. They were Luxembourgers.

Q: What is your unvarnished opinion of the quality of FSO personnel? The professional diplomats?

FARKAS: Well, of course, you can't make an overall, general rule, but I do think that they sometimes hesitate making a decision because it's not within the format of the diplomatic peripheries.

Q: Do you think this is because of the "promotion up or selection out" business? That they're afraid to put their careers on the line?

FARKAS: I think so; I think so; very much so. That's why I liked Peter Tarnoff so much. He just figured, "If I'm wrong, I'm wrong, and what the heck!" And another very nice man--I think John Hollingsworth later left me--and I got a very nice young man by the name of O'Connell; a lovely kid.

Q: By the way, how did you like John's work?

FARKAS: I found John a very fine Foreign Service Officer, but he got so German, you know, really. I used to get a kick out him, though. You know, he'd wear these plus-fours, and it was always "kuss die Hand." I used to get a kick out of it. But he was a very nice, a good worker.

Q: Yes, yes. And he knows his business.

FARKAS: When he was going to do something, you could be sure that John would do it. It was going to get done.

Q: And another thing that certainly was true in North Africa: he was very, very aware of where Uncle Sam's money went, and you never had to worry that there would be anything funny going on if John was handling the books.

FARKAS: Yes, I know, I know.

Q: With your staff, did you ever have any problems of morale? I couldn't imagine it in Luxembourg, but did you have any alcoholism, that sort of thing, among your people?

FARKAS: No, they were really terrific. I had two men down in Communications that were out of this world. There were no hours that they wouldn't work. They were really terrific.

Q: Luxembourg's a plum, of course.

FARKAS: Yes. I don't think a group could have been better. I'm not kidding. I'm not just saying that. As I say, you make them feel they're part of you, and that's very important.

I remember when we first opened--you know, I opened up the first cultural center in Luxembourg, because I felt that the Russians were doing such a job and we weren't doing anything. I said to my social secretary, "Miriam, we've got to have something."

"Well," she said, "Let's see if we can't get some building." We got the building from the government. It wasn't being used. I think it was an art gallery, or something--first floor and basement. We asked the government if we could have it, open it up, and they said

yes. We got 3,000 books first, and then we had some pictures and things like that, so we'd have an art show. Then we started to have children's books, and it really became a heck of a wonderful center, because, you see, Miami University--now, not the University of Miami, but Miami University from Ohio--had their junior year there. They really enjoyed it, because it was a place for them to come, and there were American things there.

Q: Where'd you get the books?

FARKAS: From our government.

Q: From the Department--USIS?

FARKAS: Yes. And then, of course, a lot of other people gave us books.

Q: Who was your USIS officer, your PAO [Public Affairs Officer]?

FARKAS: We didn't have one.

Q: You didn't have a PAO? Who did you put in charge of the library?

FARKAS: Actually, Miriam. She did it.

Q: She handled that? Well, that was pretty good. It still exists, does it?

FARKAS: Oh yes. It's gotten much bigger.

Q: Sometimes it takes an outsider to point out the obvious.

FARKAS: Yes. I couldn't imagine not having something cultural for the Americans who were there, or even for Luxembourgers interested in Americans. And they're so interested.

Q: Is there a very large group there, an American group?

FARKAS: No.

Q: No? But I suppose they drift through all the time?

FARKAS: Oh, yes; that they do, but, I mean, as stationary, no. There's the American-Luxembourg Society, you know, and these Luxembourgers, they adore the Americans, I tell you.

Q: How did they react to having another American ambassador who was not only a woman, but a political one?

FARKAS: Well, I wasn't political. You see, I was diplomatic--I never did anything political, to say. I never was out for this Republican or that one, no. What I did was

mostly in the cultural area, or diplomatic service, like UNESCO's Science Commission. Being on the Executive Committee of the Science Commission is not political. And all of these things--for handicapped, not political.

Q: Was that brought out in the press--all the things you had done back here? Was it explained to them what your background was?

FARKAS: Well, I'll tell you. When I first came here, I went to the Prime Minister, Mr. Werner-- Pierre Werner--when the Communists were talking all this kind of nonsense, and I said to him, before I even took the oath, "If you feel that you're unhappy or dissatisfied--if I'm questionable," I said, "I can leave before we have any problem." He said, "Absolutely not. We're looking forward to having you. We're very proud of your background, and we know you're going to make a great ambassador." I must tell you, he was just wonderful.

Q: Since you didn't have a PAO, a USIS group, I wondered how the press was notified, so that people would know what your background was. Did anybody publish any articles in Luxembourg about you? You have a very rich background.

FARKAS: No, only the government knew.

I felt that seeing Luxembourg was a big financial center--we had, at that time, 18 American banks in Luxembourg--I figured it would be good for our American banks to get with the European bankers and try to discuss things. I'd always give them a good lunch, and good cigars, and what not, and they would banter things around. Well, I must tell you something: we gave them a lot of information; they didn't do too much for us.

Q: Really?

FARKAS: No. They're very closed-mouthed, very closed-mouthed. Anyway, our bankers liked it, because they got the feeling they did get some information.

Q: And you did this every two months?

FARKAS: Every two months, yes. When I was in Luxembourg, there were about 90 banks, you know, and so I would choose different banks. I always had the American bankers. That was 18, and then I'd always have about 12--because I had a tremendous dining room and it opened out to be a big salon, and I always opened it. Then I'd let Peter carry on if something else were planned, or if I had to do something else at the embassy.

Q: If your husband wasn't there, did you have Peter serve as host? Or did you just run it yourself?

FARKAS: I served as my own host and hostess; I didn't do anything about it. I felt comfortable doing it. I was brought up in a family where my mother was head of a big

business, and at home with my own husband, we had to do a heck of a lot of entertaining to foreigners and businessmen.

Q: So the entertaining must have been really very easy for you. It was something you've always done.

Q: No problem. I brought my own help.

Q: You brought your own help from Jamaica.

FARKAS: So my cook knew exactly what she had to do. You know--all the accoutrements that went with the meal.

Q: Was your house furnished well enough? Or did you have to bring a lot of your own stuff? I mean, quite apart from the art.

FARKAS: Yes. I recovered the furniture. My husband went there first, came back to me, and he said, "Honey, that place hasn't been redone for God knows!" Of course, the Ambassador before me, Kingdon Gould, had too many children and couldn't live in that house. [He] took a house in the country. He had ten kids.

Q: Oh, I didn't know that.

FARKAS: So it wasn't lived in really at all. He had a few affairs in it, but that's it. When my husband saw it, he said, "It's sad. You might be able to do something with the furniture, but you'd have to have it recovered." He said, "The electrical wiring is dangerous." He was very aware of that, having department stores, you know. So he said, "Unless the government does something about rewiring and repainting that place, and putting some bricks in where they're out, and taking that ivy off," because there was ivy growing over the windows and in the windows, he said, "You can't go there. You just cannot." The government gave me \$80,000. But I want you to know, it cost me another ninety.

Q: Did it really?

FARKAS: Yes. Recovered the furniture, did some of the rugs over. As you know, you have to do it.

Q: Sure. Well, did you find that your entertainment allowance was adequate for this?

FARKAS: No, I dug into my own pocket.

Q: You had to dig into your own?

FARKAS: I guess if you wanted it very simple, it could have been done. But somehow . . .

Q: You had to use your own money to do it the way you thought it should be done. And I suppose you also wanted to see that your officers had enough money to entertain?

FARKAS: When they entertained, yes. They'd always tell me how much they were using, and if they needed more, I'd give it to them, you know.

Q: Sure, sure. Did you inherit any particular problems with the Luxembourg government when you took over from Kingdon--well, you didn't take over from Gould--you took over from the chargé.

FARKAS: From Galanto. No, not really, not really.

Q: Things were running.

FARKAS: Things were running all right, except that the Russian Ambassador didn't like Galanto too much. And he didn't like [Gould] any better. So when I first went there, it was very interesting. You know, you have to meet all the ambassadors. His deputy said, "The ambassador only speaks Russian and German." I said, "Really. Well, I'll speak French, if he could." He said, "No, no. You speak French, and I'll interpret."

Well, I couldn't do too much about it. So I spoke to him in French, and whatever he said, I still don't know. A lot of the other ambassadors were cordial, but they shunned him to a certain extent. He'd been there a long time. He was there about nine years when I got there.

Q: They do that, because then they become the doyen of the Corps.

FARKAS: I know. It's true. He was the *doyen*. He had a lot of receptions, and I'd go and I'd always ask if I could bring an escort, and I'd bring somebody from the embassy with me. He had a charming wife, by the way. They used to live together before he became the ambassador; he had to marry her. They have a little girl and a son. She used to be an opera singer. She didn't have much to do with us. Even if she went to a luncheon, they'd pick her up, maybe after she was there a half hour or so. Had a very nice embassy, but they had a great big wall built around it. They don't want us to see in.

I don't know why, but he sort of took a liking to me, and one day the embassy called me up to ask me if I would accompany him and a couple of other ambassadors to the Unknown Soldier [monument] in Luxembourg. Well, I didn't know there was an Unknown Russian Soldier in Luxembourg. Of course, they were our allies. At that time Haig wasn't there. Nixon was some place off in the skies. I don't know; I never was able to talk to him. I said, "Well, I've got to figure it out myself." I was thinking about it: Should we honor a Russian Unknown Soldier? And then I said to myself, "Well, at that

time they were our allies. It was their unknown hero. Just then, the French ambassador called me up and said to me, "Are you going?" I said, "Well, it's not the greatest thing we're doing. There's no secrecy about it, and it will please him no end. After all, he is the *doyen*. Maybe we can get somebody from Ireland or the Netherlands." I think it was the ambassador from the Netherlands who came; [there were] three of us.

Q: The three of you went.

FARKAS: And we accompanied him. He was very grateful because the French Ambassador had said, "If the American Ambassador will come, I'll come."

Q: Do you feel that the American Ambassador is always the preeminent one in these places?

FARKAS: I think so.

Q: In Europe?

FARKAS: I think so. Well, it was. I don't know whether it is today. After that, it's very funny- -he called me up one day and wanted to talk to me about something, and I said, "Why don't you come alone? Don't you understand some French?" He said, "Not much." I said, "I understand some German." I did. I didn't speak it well, but I understood it. I said, "So, we can get along." He said, "Well, perhaps."

So that's when I said to Peter, "Look! Look out of the window. If he comes with his deputy, you're going to stay in the room. If he comes alone, you stay out." And he came alone, surprisingly enough.

Q: Well, that was quite a coup.

FARKAS: Yes. And he was talking about life in Russia, and how now you could buy an apartment and give it to your family but not if you had a lease. If you have a lease, you couldn't give the lease to anyone. And he had a son there and things were picking up a little better, et cetera, et cetera. And then [he] started to ask me something that had to do politically with our own government, which I tried to answer. After that, he was most cordial. I mean, I never had any kind of problem with him. Whatever he gave, he always invited me. You know, when Franco had these eight men electrocuted in Spain?

Q: Yes.

FARKAS: Well, the name of the ambassador was Alvarez, or something, and poor fellow, nobody spoke to him when that happened. I mean, as if it was his fault! I couldn't stand it. Nobody would talk to him.

Q: Is that right?

FARKAS: He lived on my street, so one day I saw him. He said, "It's getting very lonesome." I said, "Yes, I know." He said, "Would you--", my husband was there at the time, "Would you and your husband come over and play bridge with us one night and have dinner?"

I said, "We're not bridge players." I said, "I haven't played bridge for so long, I forgot all about it. I'm sure my husband did too." "Well," he said, "We'll try." So we came. You know, the Spanish eat at 10 o'clock.

Q: Yes.

FARKAS: My husband, when we didn't have guests, liked to eat at 7:30. So I said, "Honey, have something before you go." He said, "No, I'm not hungry." Anyway, we go, and they had the table set up with cards, drinks, whatever you wanted--sherry, wine. We played cards. It was about 10 o'clock, and I could see my husband passing out with hunger.

Q: Sure, sure.

FARKAS: And I said, "Ambassador (or Madam--whatever), I'm sorry to ask you this, but do you think you could have some tiny little hors d'oeuvres, sandwiches, or something?"

So, in Spanish, he said to his butler, "You know, these are Americans. They eat early. They're very hungry. Maybe you could put something on that we can serve earlier than what you were doing." And the guy said, "Well, we do have some poultry we could serve, but", he says, "the roast is in the oven." I looked up at him and I said, "Well then, use the chicken; don't use the roast." Well, the Ambassador was shocked. He said, "Do you speak Spanish?" I said, "Yes." "Oh," he says, "You're a spy." Kidding me.

I said, "You bet." He said, "I didn't know." I said, "Yes," so he started to talk Spanish to me. I said, "Let's talk English. My husband doesn't speak Spanish." He was very nice. He was there for a while after I stepped down, and after he left, he sent me quite a few letters. Just very nice.

Q: So you built up good rapport with a number of countries that way.

FARKAS: Yes, I did, and also with the Belgian Ambassador. He was a different--he knew my sister-in-law's family. Didn't know the relationship, but he knew that we knew them. With the English, I had good rapport with all of them, you know. I didn't become too friendly. Nor with women. I was the Ambassador; I was the Ambassador's wife. I was both, you know.

Q: That's right.

FARKAS: You couldn't bother with the women very much anyway, because I had my own things to do, so that kept me from that end. They used to have these Luxembourg-American bridge tournaments. You know, I didn't play bridge anyway, but my husband had a secretary--terrific woman--who would come and stay with me two, three months, and catch up with a lot of things I needed. So I would send her out to this bridge stuff, and every time she won. I said, "Listen, Virginia, one more time you win, I'm going to shoot you."

She said, "Well, what shall I do about it? You have partners; you can't fool around." I said, "Fool around." The last time she came back she said, "You know, I fooled around. What happened was, I really took the craziest chances. I made a grand slam." She says, "You're going to kill me."

Q: She won anyway? Isn't that funny?!

Could you tell me about presenting your credentials? What you wore, and that sort of thing. What kind of occasion is it, anyway?

FARKAS: I don't have that picture, do? I wore--oh, it was very lovely. You have to dress formal--top hat for your chief officers. I wore a very pretty lace dress and hat.

Q: To the floor?

FARKAS: Yes, and a hat that went with it, and gloves. We were presented to the Court. The Chamberlain of the Court came down to meet us. We met the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess, and they told us they were glad we were there. They served some drinks and things like that; it was very nice--really lovely. Nice affair. It lasted about an hour.

Q: That's a long time.

FARKAS: Yes, well, we were talking about a lot of things. I don't know what we got to talking about--racial problems.

Q: Really?

FARKAS: Because they were having problems at that time. You know, they had on contract the Greeks and the Turks working in the steel mills, and they were all asking about what were the problems in New York.

Q: Can you remember your first day, when you arrived at the post? What happened?

FARKAS: Oh, Galanto came down to meet me, and Hollingsworth came down to meet me. People from the embassy came to meet me.

Q: This was at the airport, was it?

FARKAS: Yes. I was there with my husband. They gave me flowers--very pretty. Then we went to the embassy and they let me alone because my help were there already. I sent my help ahead of me.

Q: I see, yes.

FARKAS: It was a very quiet first evening. Then I got a lovely call from the Prime Minister, telling me, "Welcome," and so forth and so on. It was very nice. Oh--at the airport they had these Communist kids tutored, "Want the Ambassador to go home." "Ambassador buys position"--stuff like that. And that's when I went to see the Prime Minister and told him right away. I wanted to get it straight, and then I never had any problem.

Oh, I went to see the Bishop, who is an elderly gentleman. I figured, "I'll pay my deference to him." So I called him up and asked him if I could have some of his time. He was very gallant. I came there at about 4 o'clock. He said, "Let's have tea." So we did. His first interest was with the problems with the blacks and the slums and what-not. I told him about it, and what was happening, and what would come to pass. About coming into this beam of political and educational life, my degrees, and so forth. It was very nice. I went to see him several times.

They had an eminent statesman by the name of Beckeri. Probably one of the most eminent statesmen they had, because he was world-renowned for his economics. He was one of Schuman's directors, and a very nice man he was. He was funny, too. I was wearing some kind of tea dress. He says, "Is that American or French?"

I said, "Now you wouldn't be so foolish as to think I was going to wear a French dress when I was coming to see you. It's American." And he said, "Bravo!" It was very cute. He was very nice.

Q: Did you go to many functions where the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess were present?

FARKAS: They don't go to functions.

Q: They don't go to them?

FARKAS: They *have* functions. They have functions on the main holidays and things like that. I told you, I think mine was the only embassy they ever visited.

Q: Is that so?

FARKAS: Because they wanted to see the pictures.

Q: Yes. And then you had to do that sort of--

FARKAS: Yes, quietly. But they never, never, never visited anyone. That's taboo.

Q: Did you build up a good relationship with the Prime Minister?

FARKAS: With the both of them, because I had Pierre Werner and then I had Gaston Thorn.

Q: Oh, I see. Oh, yes, you mentioned him.

FARKAS: When Gaston Thorn comes here I always see him, one way or the other.

Q: So you had very good relationships with all these people. Could you describe briefly a typical day in the life of an American Ambassador in Luxembourg?

FARKAS: Well, you get [to the office] very early in the morning--at least I did--because I knew there were so many telegrams waiting. Don't forget that we were six hours ahead of the US, so you had to catch up, too, because some of them had to be answered before the close of day. I would come to my office about--I was there usually about 8 o'clock, and I must say, my secretary was terrific; she was there, too. And then they all would be coming in about quarter to nine, nine o'clock.

Q: You got there first, eh?

FARKAS: Yes, she and I. Of course, the Marines were always around; they would be there night and day, as you know. You have raising of the flag and all those kinds of things. First of all, I'd go through telegrams and I'd answer anything that had to be answered. Then I would go through the things that had to be done in Luxembourg during the day. There were a lot of things that had to be done--an ambassador wanted to know one thing--the chief justice of Luxembourg wanted to know another thing--I told you, I was active with their aging, with their retarded.

Q: Yes, you were; yes.

FARKAS: You know, they didn't do too much with their aging, and one of the institutions there really needed medical help. I offered to get some doctors from New York University to come. New York University said they would do it--come and work in Luxembourg for a year.

Q: Really?

FARKAS: But somehow they didn't accept it, and I never pushed it. But they admitted that they really lack good medical help, because, you see, they don't have any universities there, so everybody's educated outside. A lot of them don't come back, and a lot of them

who do come back are not really Luxembourgers any more. As I say, their hospitals don't have things for research, so it's really rough. I think that's why they couldn't accept the American doctors. American doctors were all in it for research and things like that.

Q: Do they have a Social Security system there? A health system, the way the French do?

FARKAS: Yes, they do.

Q: So you don't find people really destitute?

FARKAS: No, there's no poverty. The only people who don't have as much are those who come in on contract, the Turkish . . .

Q: And the Greeks, you said.

How often did you have your staff meetings?

FARKAS: I had a staff meeting once a week, and usually that was on a Friday.

Q: And you'd go over the--

FARKAS: Whatever had to be done, or if something specially had to be looked into, or something had to be programmed for the following week that needed more work on it, and things like that.

Q: You sort of conducted these, and had everybody chip in?

FARKAS: They'd come into my office, a good-sized office, a good-sized table, and we'd sit around it and throw out ideas.

Q: You encouraged them? Collegial, in other words?

FARKAS: That's right. You know, having been a college instructor for many years, you're used to working with them.

Q: How long did it take before you felt really at home there?

FARKAS: I got there in April. By middle or end of June they'd be leaving for something or other. Luxembourgers would take their holidays.

Q: Oh, really, they'd all clear out?

FARKAS: By August, everybody's cleared out. Of course, April, May, June--there's not that much time. I figured it was a good time for me to get to know, not the political people, but the people in the country, and so, because of the things I knew I had to do for my own country, I got to know who was important and who wasn't, and I got to know the

person who could do most for me when it came to doing a very needful, political thing for my own country. I had to choose between a Luxembourger and the consul from Monte Carlo whom I knew, but who, unfortunately or fortunately, had married the ex-daughter-in-law of the chief of Arbed, and they couldn't stand him. I figured either I have to cut him off out of my life. . .

Q: Yes?

FARKAS: Which I did. I did, and I became friends with the others. It paid off. I got to know the people from Arbed, then people from Thyssen who have interests with the cigarette manufacturers. I got to know them. And Thyssen--I made sure I did something with that, not only the steel mills, but I got to know heads of these mills.

The head of one of the biggest metal international works in the world was living in Luxembourg, by the name of Henry Leir. He's a great philanthropist, too. It was really one of my own men who told me when I first got there. He said, "There's a man who is terribly powerful with the prime minister--that was when Gaston Thorn was the prime minister--and with the government, and also with the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess, and it would be wise thing for you to cultivate him.

So I cultivated him and invited him to my home, and it was very worthwhile. In fact, on his 75th birthday--he had done me a big favor--I asked him what I could do for him, and he said, "Give me my 75th birthday party in your residence." His wife said, "Now don't do that. You know she's got enough to do." To me she said, "Don't you do it for him."

I said, "Yes, I shall. Just give me the names of your friends." Which he did, a lot of people in government and whatnot, so it didn't do us any harm either. I gave him a wonderful party and I think he was most grateful.

Q: That's quite a compliment that he felt he could ask you.

FARKAS: Yes. We invited the prime minister. I said, "I think the prime minister's going to go off some place." He said, "Not before my birthday." And it was true, too; he didn't. He didn't go until afterwards. He came to the party. I can't tell you--anyone who's who in Luxembourg or Belgium--I invited them. He was so pleased.

Q: What did you see as the most important facet of your role as an ambassador?

FARKAS: Well, first of all, I think Luxembourg, as far as we were concerned, is not only part of NATO, but was very important to the EEC, and while we weren't part of the EEC, remember that we needed import-export, so it was terribly important for me to see what they were doing and to try to cultivate things so we could do something.

In fact, one of my biggest disappointments was that our government had asked me to see if we couldn't get something really big going, and I became very friendly with the head of

the steel mills. One night he called me up and said, "I have something to tell you. We are thinking of building rolling mills." Now, rolling mills are things that make the steel flat, and they cost \$215 million a mill. He said, "This is the first time we're going to let the United States bid for it."

I said, "Oh, gosh. Isn't that something." He said, "We're very pleased with what you're doing here." I immediately called our Department of Commerce. Forget it! I said, "We need someone to give us some kind of financial basis for what we might be doing." That's a decision with an informational format. Nothing happened. Sent another telegram saying, "I'm waiting." Of course, France was bidding; Germany was bidding; another company was bidding. Why couldn't we? Finally, I thought, well, our biggest--what was the steel mill that Shultz was active with? Blau-Knox and another one?

Q: I don't know.

FARKAS: Two big ones. Blau-Knox said it was too busy doing things in the East--in the Arab countries. They couldn't bother with it. And the other one couldn't bother with it either. I really was mad.

Q: I wonder why. Why did they do this?

FARKAS: Because they weren't set up to do that kind of business with Europe. We never did before, and they didn't want to do it. They were already doing so much with the oil people that they didn't need any more business. Finally I sent a telegram to Kissinger and I said, "The ball is in your court. Do what you want to." We didn't get it.

Q: They didn't even bid?

FARKAS: No, never. I think Germany and France got it.

Q: Isn't that strange?

FARKAS: Not so strange. Our Commerce Department somehow was never strong. Maybe it is now--I don't know. It certainly wasn't strong then.

I was disappointed. I was disappointed when I was trying to get these people to buy soft goods in the United States, because we certainly can compete with anyone--except maybe with the Far Eastern countries, who weren't doing so much in those days.

Q: What do you mean by soft goods?

FARKAS: Well, I mean things like clothing, cloth, sheets, pillowcases, draperies, house goods, things like that. That's soft goods.

Q: Did you have a lot of V.I.P.s?

FARKAS: No.

Q: They went to Belgium and Paris?

FARKAS: They would go to Paris, they would go to Belgium. They only came to Luxembourg when they needed something very special. Otherwise, we didn't have too many of them visit.

Q: So you placed your greatest emphasis on commercial affairs. Is that a safe thing to say?

FARKAS: No, I wouldn't say that.

Q: No?

FARKAS: No, I wouldn't say commercial affairs. I think, commercial and diplomatic, really, in that order.

Q: In diplomatic, too? Building up good will, representing the US to other people?

FARKAS: Right, in as many ways as possible. That's what I mean. When I did this thing for the retarded, although I was personally interested, certainly they knew that we, as people of the United States, were not only interested in doing diplomatic work, we were interested in their people, their country. They appreciated it.

Q: What did you do, exactly, along these lines?

FARKAS: I went to visit the Institutes for Aging to see what we could do for them. Also, at the university, I gave two of the graduating groups graduation parties. I came and spoke to them. I was active with that, too. I'll tell you what else I did. You know, most of these students in Luxembourg used to go to different places for their education. So once a year, in May, when they'd all come back, I would have a big meeting and invite as many university students as I could get, and we'd have a big roundup. I would have sort of a buffet for them, and we'd sit down and discuss what was going on in other countries in education and so forth. They used to look forward to it.

Q: You were doing your own USIS work, weren't you?

FARKAS: Yes; well, in a way. We could have run three of them because, you know, we could entertain just the first 100, 200 that came, and that was it. We couldn't have any more.

Q: Was this open house?

FARKAS: Open house, right, right.

Q: Did you also have the retarded in your home?

FARKAS: Oh, yes.

Q: Oh, you did, as well as the elderly?

FARKAS: Sure. I had the retarded come and I'd give them a meal and we'd show them cartoons and give them funny little things to take home. They loved it.

Q: Did you get a lot of nice write-ups in the paper when you did these things? Did the press pay attention to the fact that the American Ambassador was concerned?

FARKAS: I didn't really care.

Q: No, but we do. [Laughs]

FARKAS: Yes, well, I must tell you, the woman who was head of the *Republique de Lorraine*, that's their main paper, was really very much touched at my interest in them, and so she gave me a lot of space. In fact, for the big gala, she printed up all the invitations and everything else. Then, of course, we had Luxembourg Radio, and Television Luxembourg was the biggest in that part of the world. The guy who was head of it, by the name of Felton, gave me all the space I needed.

Q: Oh, that's great!

FARKAS: All the time, all the space. He spoke to them in French; he spoke in every language you can think of, and they gave it to us all for free. The "Gala de Joie" was done to raise money for the Institution for the Handicapped. They needed therapy instruction and tools. We made \$90,000 on that gala. It set up the institution as a teaching institute instead of a custodial home as it was before they got this money for therapy programs.

Q: This has been most interesting, Ambassador Farkas. I want to thank you for sharing your thoughts as well as your memories of a fascinating and worthwhile life.

End of interview