

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program  
Foreign Service Spouse Series

**NAOMI MATHEWS**

*Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi*  
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## INTERVIEW

*Q: Let us begin by talking about your experiences as AAFSW President.*

MATHEWS: Well, I really don't know what I can say about it, except that it was a time of great ferment. Board meetings were held in this room once a month. We discussed everything in the world that Foreign Service women were talking about at that time. We never came to a consensus. Various members went around and asked questions of friends about their feelings. It was a time when this so called Directive had to happen. I am horrified at the way I sound!

*Q: You're thinking as you go along. Everyone says, "That can't be me talking"; it's because we're thinking as we talk, we're reflecting, we're going back over years and years. And after we've talked for a while I think it becomes easier.*

MATHEWS: Yes, I think so. Let's say a little more on this.

*Q: Please do, please do. You had just said that the Directive had to happen.*

MATHEWS: I went on record strongly then, personally, that I was against it. I thought it was not possible to reduce anything to writing. I have had ample opportunity to say, "I told you so". I restrained myself because, as I said before, there was no stopping it. It had to happen. It was interesting that most of the people that I talked to who were so strongly in favor of it had had very little experience abroad; but they were very intense and vocal! You can see I get a little emotional when I'm talking about it now, because I did feel very strongly about it. I think that's enough, unless you have some more questions.

*Q: I do have a question. Do you feel that, as you have just said, there was no stopping it. It went through; do you feel that it went through without the Department realizing the implications? It was almost as though they washed their hands of us. They made us independent individuals.*

MATHEWS: At first they didn't know what had happened. Actually, it's my understanding that the first draft was simply an exercise; you know, a group of women getting together and talking about their frustrations and their criticisms of the life of women in Foreign Service. I'm not sure how it got to the Department, but the first thing we knew it had gone abroad. [The reaction generally was one of shock and then came months of discussion and agitation before the final draft was finished and the Directive made official.]

*Q: They couldn't stop it?*

MATHEWS: No

*Q: It had gained so much momentum.*

MATHEWS: Yes, it had

*Q: I felt at the time that perhaps there was some good to it; but I also felt that I had been cast adrift.*

MATHEWS: Yes, there were good things in it, but too many things, as I said, which could not be reduced to writing. Our lives are too different in Foreign Service; posts are different. It just can't be done. I think it has hurt the Foreign Service.

*Q: Do you feel that today there is some looking back; there is some second thought?*

MATHEWS: Yes.

*Q: I think something's going to happen.*

MATHEWS: Oh yes, I think there are second thoughts. I've seen several indications that they're going back to some of the values.

*Q: The tradition, That worked.*

MATHEWS: Tradition, yes, absolutely. I was interested, among other things, to see that some of the wives had asked to learn a bit about protocol. You know everything had gone out the window. They were going to provide some guidance there. I well remember when...I don't know when you came into the Foreign Service...it was during the Wristonization.

*Q: Oh, yes. We came in in 1956. Wristonization was still going on. Or was it winding down then?*

MATHEWS: There were lots of wives then who were going abroad for the first time and in senior positions. Some of them were very worried, and I know the Institute set up courses for them just to let them ask questions. I thought it was really very good. There was a woman in charge of it [Regina Blake] who provided the atmosphere [in which the women were comfortable asking questions]. They were rather ashamed to ask such questions as "How do you make a call?" Of course, not in many posts do you do anything that is strictly formal. But, I've always felt that everyone going abroad, certainly in my day, should know as much as possible about the rules of conduct in diplomacy. You can take it or leave it. In some places, it doesn't apply at all. In many situations you would be silly to use it; but you need to know it.

*Q: It's to do what is expected of you, in the context of the culture.*

MATHEWS: Yes, it makes it so much easier for everybody.

*Q: Have you been following the Foreign Service Associate proposal?*

MATHEWS: Not too closely, I must confess that after having spent 38 years in the Foreign Service, and finishing off by being President of AAFSW for two years, I thought it was time to step aside. I don't respond when I'm asked to be active in some of these matters of the Association. I think my day is passed.

*Q: Of course, I think we all learn from history.*

MATHEWS: We do. I'm willing to talk when I'm asked about what's gone on in my day. But this is a different time.

*Q: It is.*

MATHEWS: It is a different time, and frankly I don't know how I would feel if I were a young person going into Foreign Service. Now when WE entered Foreign Service, I was delighted. When I met my husband, I knew he was going to be in Foreign Service, and that was wonderful. I loved the thought of life in Foreign Service.

*Q: You went into the Foreign Service as a bride?*

MATHEWS: Yes, I'd been married four months or something like that.

*Q: But, in 1935; was that it?*

MATHEWS: Yes

*Q: And off you went to Vancouver.*

MATHEWS: Vancouver, yes. Bert had been waiting for several years. He passed the examination, was all ready, and then there was a freeze on appointments.

*Q: Because of the Depression, I suppose.*

MATHEWS: Yes. He waited until 1935. He did various things around the University of California, just waiting.

*Q: He went to Berkeley I noticed in the Biographic Register. Did you, too?*

MATHEWS: I did my last year.

*Q: My husband and I went to Berkeley, too.*

MATHEWS: Did you? It's different now, you know.

*Q: Yes*

MATHEWS: We were so thrilled to go to Vancouver. I remember in those days it was so simple. Everything was so unorganized that we didn't even know we were supposed to let them know in Vancouver that we were coming.

*Q: How wonderful. Did you drive up?*

MATHEWS: No, we went by train. And we had a marvelous two years there. It was a Consulate General, of course. I led a rather frivolous life. I didn't know any better. I played bridge Well, I was in my early 20s.

*Q: That's very young, isn't it?*

MATHEWS: It was a very pleasant time. People were kind to us.

*Q: You could speak English.*

MATHEWS: We spoke English.

*Q: It's always nice to have a post like that.*

MATHEWS: We lived in a beautiful house; I don't know how we afforded it. But one could then. It was probably one of the nicest houses we had in our lifetime. I'm joking a bit, but it was a nice house. Then we came back to Washington. I don't want to ramble, you ask a question.

*Q: I'm just fascinated because you are taking me back to 1935.*

MATHEWS: Well, we came back to Washington and there was Bert's class. We were married, except for one or two [officers]. We got lots of attention, because one did then. We called at the White House and were invited to tea. We called on the Secretary of State's wife. She sent her cards around, returned our call.

*Q: This was as a young junior officer? Really!*

MATHEWS: Yes, and then I remember leaving my cards at what is now the Cosmos Club. It was Sumner Welles' home then and he was Assistant Secretary of State. It was exciting. I'm sorry that the young people today don't have that sort of involvement.

*Q: Do you by chance know how many officers there were in the Foreign Service then?*

MATHEWS: Oh, I think I've seen the number 800. You sort of knew everybody.



*Q: Everybody?*

MATHEWS: Many by reputation anyway. You knew the names. Well, there was a Foreign Service school of sorts. I don't really remember what my husband did. There was a marvelous woman named Cornelia Bassell, ever hear of her?

*Q: Yes, I think I have.*

MATHEWS: She was assistant to the Chief of Personnel. The class [of young officers] she called her boys. We were her children. I can't remember what she did for us except that we were very often with her. She gave a party for us when we all left and she took us wives up to a room in Old State to wait while our husbands got their first assignments. I can remember to this day how excited she was, really a wonderful, lovely woman. We went to Sydney, Australia. It was a Consulate General. We did not have a Mission in Australia. Am I being too wordy?

(Miss Bassell was the sister-in-law of John William Davis who was the defeated Democratic presidential candidate in 1924. (He had been nominated on the 103rd ballot.) Davis had been Ambassador to Great Britain, where Miss Bassell visited and became interested in the Foreign Service. By 1932 she was assistant to the Director of the FS Officers' Training School, where she initiated informal spouse training. She lived to be a nonagenarian.)

*Q: No, not at all. I just was checking to see, you went from Sydney to Adelaide to Brisbane, so you had a number of years in Australia.*

MATHEWS: No, not so long actually. I'll just continue like this. Our Consul General was Tom Wilson, who had been head of Personnel. He went out to Sydney the same time we did. He was a great friend of Miss Bassell. This was a Consulate General, but it was our big office in Australia. There was a Consul General, a Consul, and a Vice-Consul, which was my husband. The Consul General was a bachelor. The wife of the Consul was ill and not active much of the time.

*Q: So there you were.*

MATHEWS: Yes.

*Q: And this was your second post.*

MATHEWS: Yes, and to be so involved at that age made it very interesting and very exciting. I can remember the Consul General was having Prime Minister Menzies to dinner. He said, "Now Honey, you must remember not to go rushing into the dining room first." As if I would! "You must wait and come last with the Prime Minister." Little bits of diplomatic protocol, you know, all along he would teach me. He would write to Miss Bassell and tell her whether I did well or not. Can you imagine having that scrutiny?

She would write me and say Mr. Wilson said that you did very nicely or maybe you should remember to do this or that. It was really kind of wonderful that someone was taking an interest. I wasn't the only one I'm sure, but she took more interest in me because I was there with her very good friend and next door neighbor, Mr. Wilson. I may make it sound a little more dramatic than it really was.

*Q: No, but I think that's charming, because one of the things that happens in the Service today is that you don't have that personal contact with the Department, especially if you're in an isolated, say tropical post. I think this is definitely a case of small being beautiful, and as you say, people knowing one another by reputation.*

MATHEWS: Well, where do I go from here? Mr. Wilson was so kind to us. When the Consul left Adelaide on leave he would send Bert and me down to spend a month. That's how we got there.

*Q: Oh, how you got to Adelaide then.*

MATHEWS: And the same thing with Brisbane.

*Q: With Brisbane. So it gave you an opportunity to see much more of Australia. But, in those days did you travel by ship.*

MATHEWS: Oh yes, To go to Australia we went on the Matson Line from San Francisco. We went down on the Monterrey and came back on the Mariposa. And I remember coming back on the Mariposa, we were diverted to Tahiti. We met the Consul there, just one lone man way down there in Tahiti. He was very glad to see us. I feel that I'm rambling.

*Q: No, no, I just don't want this to stop. I want to capture every word.*

MATHEWS: Well, you stop me.

*Q: No, no. I'm just afraid the tape is going to end and then I must turn it over. Yesterday, Frances was telling me a lovely story and the tape ended. Then we had to pick up and do the story over again. I don't want that to happen. But you were coming back from Australia, and had gotten as far as Tahiti.*

MATHEWS: We spent a couple of days in Tahiti with, ah, his name was Scudder Mersman.

*Q: We did have a number of lovely trips, to and from Europe, to and from North Africa. And I compare that with being packed into an economy class seat today.*

MATHEWS: There's no comparison.

*Q: No comparison. I mean, getting there is not half the fun anymore.*

MATHEWS: No, and I thought it was such a good thing because you prepared for it when you got this long, long leisurely...

*Q: Did you take lots of trunks and suitcases, because we did have to have clothes then?*

MATHEWS: Yes, do you know a few years ago we had them all out in the carriage house. We had big steamer trunks with hangers in them. And I remember one that my father-in-law had turned over to us. It even had an ironing board and an iron. We had all kinds of trunks because you had to. And such a lot of other luggage.

*Q: And knowing that you were going to Australia for several years, did you take clothes for that time or did you expect to find a dressmaker or to shop there?*

MATHEWS: Well, I remember taking quite a few clothes, but I had a lot made too because we stayed three years. The Australians were very interested in clothes. There were lots of Balls and occasions like that. I was with the Australians much of the time.

*Q: That's the most rewarding.*

MATHEWS: Yes, that's what you want to do. That's what you are there for. It was mostly pleasure for me, until the war. We were very conscious of the war with refugees coming in from various places. Toward the last the Queen Mary was being converted into a troop ship in Double Bay, which was in view of our living room. I can remember the telephone ringing, this would have been 1939. Bert spoke to someone and turned around and said, "This is it." You know, in 1939 when the Germans moved. You don't realize what you are experiencing [at the time].

*Q: You couldn't realize what was coming.*

MATHEWS: No. When we left Sydney there were mine sweepers in front of the ship as far as New Zealand. We went home, back to Washington and Bert was in some War office. I forget what it was now.

*Q: And then you went to Managua, which is very much in the news today.*

MATHEWS: Oh my goodness, yes. We were here for less than a year and went to Managua. Do you want to ask me questions so I'll move along instead of rambling.

*Q: No, unless you would rather that ....*

MATHEWS: Well, that was certainly a new experience. We didn't speak any Spanish. I don't know why we were sent there, but we had to scramble and learn as much as we

could.

*Q: And there was no FSI Language School.*

MATHEWS: No, no, not at all.

*Q: You just picked it up?*

MATHEWS: It wasn't very long before I could run the house pretty well in Spanish. Nicaragua is very close to the United States and most of the men that Bert dealt with in his job spoke English. But we worked at it. It was not the most pleasant place. Probably if I to say which post I liked the least, I'd say Managua, and I think it's because we had malaria, we had dysentery, we had everything. Everybody did. But I can remember too having good times. They're happy people. They like parties and dinners out under the skies, dancing in the moonlight and that sort of thing.

*Q: Health plays a huge role.*

MATHEWS: But I seem to be dwelling on that sort of thing. I met a lot of people, some of them I'm in touch with still. I'm afraid they don't live there any more. Well, when we were there I was having a siesta one [Sunday] afternoon and the telephone rang. Bert was at the office because he was on duty as the Minister was away, and Pearl Harbor!

*Q: And did you continue to stay there, or did you come back to Washington?*

MATHEWS: I can't remember now how long we stayed after that. But we came back to Washington and, what did we do then? What is next?

*Q: I have Kabul, Calcutta, Istanbul, London, Oslo.*

MATHEWS: Oh yes, well, we came home and stayed about a year. Bert was temporarily in the Latin American section. It was very hard to find a place to live. I know we lived for months with friends on Hillier Place. You couldn't get into hotels, or anywhere! So we bought a little house in Alexandria. We had just got that settled when they asked Bert if he would go to Afghanistan to replace Charlie Thayer. Charlie had come down from Russia, opened the post, and was ready to leave. They asked Bert if he'd go and he said yes, but he wanted to take me. Could he take me? The Department said "Yes, we can't think of a place where a man would need his wife more." But it wasn't that easy. He went out in January (1944), and I didn't hear from him. Things were very tough at that time. Mail, wasn't getting through.

*Q: This was still during the war...*

MATHEWS: Oh, yes, early 1944. I haunted the State Department, what is now the Old Executive Office Building, trying to get myself organized to go. Officers in the

Department that I knew tried to help me. I remember that they let me buy a car because cars were hard to get at that time because of the War. There was no transportation in Afghanistan. I bought a shiny blue Studebaker and started it on its way. I got myself booked on a little ship coming back and forth from Portugal, but was stopped at the last minute.

I decided to go to New York, and I stayed in the Barbizon Hotel for Women, which is still there. You're supposed to be as safe as you are in the YWCA! I got in touch with a man who everybody knew, Mr. Fyfe, the Department's shipping man (dispatch agent) in New York. He took me in tow and said don't leave your hotel and I'll do my best for you. I was there nearly a month. I would go out on little trips, but he wanted me to be there if he had to get in touch with me. It really was a pretty dull time. It was hot, too. There was no air conditioning.

*Q: And hard to plan ahead, because any day you may be.*

MATHEWS: Couldn't plan at all. I had a few friends who would come to see me. One day I broke away for a few hours. When I came back there were messages in my box. Mr. Fyfe wanted me to be ready in three days to leave on the Wyoming. It was taking French cadets from Canada and a few passengers to Algiers. There was a French woman correspondent and a French couple.

Well, it was a fantastic voyage. We'd look out in the morning and see the ships bouncing along in the convoy. We were supposed to be going to Algiers, but at the last minute we were diverted to Casablanca. I dumped myself on the Consul there who hadn't seen civilians for months. They were very kind and got me on a plane to Cairo and there they rallied round and got me on another to Karachi. Another Consul finally got me to New Delhi. We had some very good friends there and I stayed several days.

I was put on a train to Peshawar. I remember I was with an English woman in a compartment; an English woman who took full advantage of this. She said, when people would try to enter our compartment, "There's an American lady in here. She's come a long way, she's very, very tired." And they would move along. When I got to Peshawar, Bert was there in a command car. We picked up our shiny Studebaker which had made its way to Peshawar long before. We drove through the Khyber Pass, the command car and the jeep trailing along, on our way to Kabul. It was a two day trip. We stayed over at some old ruins where there was a guest house. Much of the way was beautiful.

When we got to Kabul, which is 6,000 feet, it looked very bleak as we went in. But when we went inside our compound, it was all lined with cypress trees, the irrigation ditches trickling along like a nice brook. The house was mud but painted white, and rambling. And there we were, in Kabul. We stayed two years, fascinating time. We had a Minister, Cornelius Van H. Engert. He died at 95 not so long ago. His wife wasn't there, so for a while after getting to Kabul, I was the only American woman in the whole country. It was war time. Most people including me knew nothing about Afghanistan. Before I came out I

could find very little in the libraries. The most recent information was an article in the Saturday Evening Post.

*Q: No Overseas Briefing Center, no Family Liaison Office, no language training.*

MATHEWS: Oh, no, you were on your own.

*Q: That's what made it exciting.*

MATHEWS: That's what made it so exciting. I just can't...

*Q: But you had an inquiring mind and you went out with a spirit of adventure.*

MATHEWS: Of course, you must have a spirit of adventure. You must have an inquiring mind. You must adore your husband.

*Q: I think that's the most vital thing right there.*

MATHEWS: And that's why I hesitate to talk about it to a lot of people, because my feeling is that a good strong marriage will take care of most problems. But that's not fair, that's not fair.

*Q: But I think it is fair, because I think a lot of what you did and a lot of what I did, we did primarily for our husbands. Now I did a little interior flag waving every time I gave a 4th of July reception or something like that. And you had a certain pride in what you were doing, but basically you did it for your husband.*

MATHEWS: Well, I think so. I really had a very nice husband, and he always said "we".

*Q: Mine too, mine too.*

MATHEWS: Even when times were very, very rough, I never thought of doing anything else. I'm a little impatient with women who seem to ... they don't want to be associated with their husbands. They want to be their own person. I never understood...

*Q: Members of the "me" generation; the 1970s "me" generation.*

MATHEWS: Yes, You're not alone ever, you have to associate with someone, have to support someone, some institution. I chose the "we". I always felt "we".

*Q: We. We were a team. You were always a wonderful team for how many, 38 years I think you said. I would like to ask one question. There are still so many young men who take the Foreign Service exam who are just pining to become diplomats. Some of them have wives, some don't. A lot of them are exactly the same, it must be just the luck of the draw. Some get in and some don't. Because they have to be more or less similar, they*

*have to be high caliber. It seems to me that if the Department looked just a little bit further and looked at the wife and said, "Look, this is what the Foreign Service is. Do you want to give us a try?" And if one said, "No, I have to have my own career, I've spent thousands getting my Masters in Business." Why doesn't the Department these days look at the wives?*

MATHEWS: I think they should. We used to say, even at that time, that if you ... I was told very seriously by a man in the Department that if in your heart you feel that you're not going to be happy tell your husband now; and don't do it. We were saying that even then.

*Q: Even then, when you...*

MATHEWS: Yes, yes.

*Q: So this is not new. This is why history is so important. I wonder how many people in the Department today know that that existed in 1935?*

MATHEWS: Well, none. I can remember when I was President of AAFSW, I would get all sorts of suggestions from all sides. I thought it was very healthy. The young groups would come to see me and criticize a great many things. I would talk to them and I'm afraid I had an advantage from having gone through all of this. There was little they told me that I couldn't top. I'm getting a little off the subject.

*Q: No, no, I'm interested in what you did in AAFSW, extremely interested because the 1972 Directive has not worked. The Foreign Service Associate Proposal has been scrapped because of Gramm-Rudman and because I think the officers wanted to scrap it anyway. They were delighted to have an opportunity, so they are going to have to find some way to deal with the spouse issue.*

MATHEWS: I just don't know how they'll do it. I really don't see a solution, except the one that you suggested, that you take a look at the wife too and screen the officers more thoroughly; and if it's not going to be a team, that is two people going abroad with the idea of service more than anything else.

*Q: Go on to another young officer.*

MATHEWS: Well, I'm incoherent when I try to express my feelings, because I don't know what the solution is or could be. I just don't know. But, to say if you feel that you're not going to fit into this life; don't go.

*Q: Perhaps the solution is the realization that there is no solution. A young wife today who is going to be plucked from Vancouver to Sydney to Managua to Kabul to Oslo cannot be a marketing manager, cannot be IBM's.*

MATHEWS: The life suited me. I liked the sort of thing that I had to do. I'm an impresario at heart. I like to manage things in a very low key, discreet way so that no one knows it, if I can help, you know.

*Q: Good for you.*

MATHEWS: You understand what I mean?

*Q: But that must have been invaluable to you in Nigeria.*

MATHEWS: Yes.

*Q: Oh, now tell me about that. That must have been invaluable, that attitude.*

MATHEWS: Now let's see, where were we. Where was I?

*Q: We got as far as Kabul, but let's see after Kabul.*

MATHEWS: There are some interesting times after Kabul. Well, we went to India.

*Q: India?*

MATHEWS: I was watching the Mountbatten (TV show). We were there during much of that period.

*Q: It was their independence.*

MATHEWS: We left a few months before Independence. We were in Calcutta. We went from Kabul to Calcutta. I think it was the scariest time that we had in the Foreign Service.

*Q: I only saw, I didn't see all of it, only parts.*

MATHEWS: Well, they were referring to the riots in Calcutta after something called Direct Action Day. The Hindus and the Muslims were at each other's throats. The carnage was simply awful. They don't know how many, but they were saying ten thousands. But there we were, all this rioting going on with bloodshed outside our gates. Little about it in the papers back home because nobody expected anything to happen. We had no correspondents in India. We would go to bed at night and hear the mob yelling and coming closer. It was a dreadful, dreadful thing.

*Q: Did the Indian government provide protection? Were you in a compound?*

MATHEWS: Oh, yes. Every house was in a compound, but we had servants that we were worried about. I know cook didn't go to the market for days on end. We had stores. Bert did go out of the gates in the car, he and the driver would take off in the morning. They



were surrounded I remember once, but nothing happened. That was in the day time, but mostly at night....

*Q: Under the cover of darkness?*

MATHEWS: Yes, that this happened. That was my first experience of that kind, our first experience. Really, for years when there would be a noise at night, I would waken and be back in Calcutta, it affected me that deeply I don't do that any more. That was a long time ago. Well, we came home, back to Washington. Bert was not too terribly old, but there were few people with Indian experience, so he was made Director of the new office, SOA [South Asian Affairs]. This was a very interesting experience to be with these new embassies. I feel that the sort of thing we were doing, that is we wives in SOA, is not done at all now. We took care of these new diplomatic women who came from India and all of these other countries in the SOA area. We took them everywhere. I remember I started some of them working at the Red Cross. We took them to the dentist and so forth. We took care of them. It was very rewarding. We never thought of doing anything else. That group in SOA, what's left of us, are very, very close and we have a little reunion every December. We are still in touch with some of the families of Indians and Pakistanis. It was very educational and very interesting. It's not done now, and I think it's too bad. I know young people in the Department that pay little attention to their opposite numbers in foreign embassies. I don't mean to be critical, but I think.....

*Q: It's another thing that is lost I think with the size, with the immensity of...*

MATHEWS: Of course. But it was just a wonderful experience and you see why I don't - there's no meeting of the minds when I talk with someone who feels that she's being deprived of her right to live her own life. This was, to me, just so wonderful.

*Q: Do you still get the AAFSW News?*

MATHEWS: Yes.

*Q: In the last issue there were three little columns, people had interviewed three young wives who were coming in. There again, I'm astonished at the qualifications of these young women. But as I interpreted the article, each of these was willing to come in and give the Foreign Service a try. And I sometimes wonder who it is over at State who thinks all the women need to be employed? That is one of the things I hope will come out of these interviews. I'm delighted to go back to 1934 with you to bring it [the Project] right up to what we'll call the state of the art spouse in 1986. That wonderful French phrase plus ça change, plus ça reste la meme chose. I think maybe we are going to find that, and I'm wondering who it is in Foggy Bottom who thinks that women have to work, that Foreign Service incomes are not enough. Where is that emanating from?*

MATHEWS: Well, I think you're quite right. It could be made important to wives if someone knew how to go about it, and do it. I just don't know.

*Q: Tell me about Nigeria.*

MATHEWS: We were in Liberia before that. It was a fascinating place.

*Q: We were in Sierra Leone.*

MATHEWS: Were you, at that time.

*Q: Yes, I came to Lagos for a conference with my husband, but you weren't there. It was in '64 and you either hadn't arrived yet or you were home.*

MATHEWS: Oh yes, we went there in 1964.

*Q: I don't think you had arrived yet. The person who took care of me was Midge Post. Her husband was economic-commercial.*

MATHEWS: We arrived in Nigeria April 1, 1964. Post? That name rings a bell.

*Q: His name was Dave Post and he must have been the commercial officer. She left while I was there to go home because her daughter was having a baby. And I remember that one of the things I did was count the silver, because she had had a huge party. There she was packing to get on the plane, to fly home to become a grandmother. She had given a huge party for all the wives who had come from all over West Africa for the conference. And she, with great apologies, fled the house the next morning for the airport to get the plane, and I counted the silver. And gave it to the houseboy to put away. Force of habit, I still count silver to this day, because I have had so many knives, forks and spoons thrown away [and retrieved from the trash] in various countries. All quite by accident.*

MATHEWS: Oh yes, that was a very important task you performed for her. Well, Liberia is first. It is interesting because Bert was the first professional Ambassador who had ever been sent there. They had always been political.

*Q: Patronage.*

MATHEWS: Yes, patronage ambassadors.

*Q: And you were the first career?*

MATHEWS: First career and first white. They [the Liberians] were rather pleased to have a professional come at last. We had a lovely big house right on the ocean. I don't know quite what to tell you about Liberia. The women were very active in most of the organizations that we know - Red Cross, YWCA, and most of the ones you can think of. I found the American women sort of up in arms because they thought they were having to help in too many charities, which is sometimes the problem. We worked on that.

*Q: So how did you handle that. Did you reduce the number of charities?*

MATHEWS: Well, slowly, slowly. Some of the Liberians got a little upset about it. I thought it had to be done. I asked that no American woman be chairman of anything, they could be co-chairman with a Liberian. I enjoyed the people, lot's of visitors came.

*Q: Did you have any Presidents or Vice Presidents, Secretaries of State?*

MATHEWS: No, the Secretary of State didn't come, but we had lots of Senators. I remember Mr. Tubman's fifth inauguration, I think it was the fifth inauguration, and they invited representatives from all over the world. We had three guests in the Residence -- Cabot Lodge, I can't remember who the others were. Lots of distinguished people would come through from time to time. The Rogers [Attorney General], I remember were there. He was not Secretary at that time. I can't remember who they all were, I'm afraid I'm not doing very well on Liberia. It was a hard post in a way.

*Q: Sierra Leone was too.*

MATHEWS: They're not terribly responsive.

*Q: And we were isolated, terribly isolated.*

MATHEWS: Yes, we really were.

*Q: And a certain lack of culture really. I shouldn't say that, a lack of culture in our terms.*

MATHEWS: Yes, it was very difficult. They liked formality. I've never had so many ball dresses.

*Q: White gloves...*

MATHEWS: White gloves, and we dressed all the time. I couldn't even go out and pay a visit to a Liberian woman without wearing a hat and gloves. Of course they were more formal than anybody. Although they were so keen on protocol, I can remember many times when a very distinguished Liberian would be invited to dinner and not show up. We were always having to reorganize the table.

*Q: Last minute shuffling of place cards.*

MATHEWS: But I loved traveling around the country and meeting the tribal people, seeing our AID projects, fascinating times. I really liked it, but it was hard. And the climate, the climate was very debilitating. Help wasn't all that good. I didn't have a good cook. As I couldn't do the cooking, I would sit on a high stool in one corner of the kitchen and tell cook what to do. House keeping was difficult.

*Q: You said that when you first went to Vancouver, you were very young and you played bridge. Was the awareness [of your responsibilities as a Foreign Service wife] gradual, or did it suddenly hit you in Sydney, when you were the number one wife, that you also had a job to do.*

MATHEWS: No, it didn't hit me even then. I think it came naturally, which was to look around and do what I could to help out here and there when people asked me.

*Q: And as your husband's responsibilities increased, you perhaps felt...*

MATHEWS: Yes, I felt it in Kabul. It's gradual, because when I got to Nigeria, I felt that I was in control, if you understand what I mean by that. That I knew what my philosophy was. I knew the kind of job I wanted to do.

*Q: But wasn't it nice to be able to be an Ambassador's wife and put that into practice.*

MATHEWS: Yes, I had learned an awful lot in Liberia. I have skipped Norway, and I've skipped London.

*Q: Do you want to go back to those?*

MATHEWS: Well, where did we go? Oh, Turkey, I've skipped Turkey. Bert was Consul General in Istanbul. That was very busy, very interesting. We lived in a wonderful old palace that had been the Legation way back. Hordes of visitors were coming through. The Sixth Fleet came in four times, I remember, in one year. We had a USO that ran all the time, or was ready to be reactivated at the drop of a hat. This was during an "era of good feeling" between the Greeks and Turks. I remember [King] Paul and Frederika [of Greece] came on a visit and people were throwing roses in the streets. It was a fabulous place. There was so much to see, so much to do, and so much to learn. We were so busy.

*Q: I've always wanted to be turned loose in an Istanbul bazaar.*

MATHEWS: Oh, yes. There was a fabulous woman who had been in the Consulate since she was about 20 years old, named Betty Carp. Ever hear of her?

*Q: I don't think so.*

MATHEWS: She is a legend. I remember she knew the Dulles family. I don't know what the connection was. Yes, Alan Dulles was there when he was a very young man. She knew more great people than anybody I had ever known. They trusted her and really respected her. (Miss Carp was a White Russian, began at the Legation around 1920 at age 18. She became a Foreign Service Officer.)

*Q: What was her role exactly?*

MATHEWS: When she was "legitimized" I think she was made a Vice Consul, but she had been a secretary. She was my mentor. If I needed anything fixed, or if I had a problem, she could fix it. I could never go to the bazaar without her going with me to be sure they weren't going to rob me. There are some very nice rugs in the dining room that she helped me buy. We had a lovely time doing it. Betty was a real institution in our Foreign Service in the Middle East. When she died, which was five or six years ago, her many friends set up a trust fund for the American Hospital in Istanbul in her name. Well, anyway, getting along, it was a very busy time. I liked the Turks. We didn't get to travel as much as we would have liked. We went to Ankara several times. The Embassy had just opened. We have a lot of unfinished business there because we were just too busy to do all the wonderful things that one can do.

You just made me think of something. During the time when the Directive was being.....

*Q: ...kicked about*

MATHEWS: Kicked about, they really made the most of the handful of difficult senior wives in the Foreign Service. There were really some pretty frightful women.

*Q: A handful?*

MATHEWS: A handful, and I had no sympathy [with colleagues who complained about them]. I would say, "Well, it's good for your character, and it doesn't last forever." It's not fun being pushed around by an unreasonable senior wife. It can make a young wife miserable, but it doesn't last forever.

*Q: It teaches her how NOT to be when her husband gains rank.*

MATHEWS: Absolutely, absolutely. (Telephone rings)

*Q: Could we go back to the wives?*

MATHEWS: What were we saying?

*Q: We were talking about the difficult wives and how even though it's unpleasant for a young Foreign Service wife to encounter one of these difficult women, as you said it is only for a short time.*

MATHEWS: And she learns how not to be. She knows how it feels to be abused in various ways.

*Q: I am interrupting you, but have you seen the Report on the Role of the Spouse in the Foreign Service? It was very informative, I thought, that the unhappiest women are the wives of ranking officers. The happiest women are the wives who can pursue their own*

*interests. The happiest wives were the ones who had some representational entertaining to do, who could follow their own interests and be with their children, have time for their children and family. As the unhappy ones, of course, had been rather vocal. That's part of the problem, there are a few unhappy...*

MATHEWS: Who talk about it.

*Q: And we have someone like Mrs. Lawrence Eagleburger who had the ear of the entire country.*

MATHEWS: I don't want to go into that. I disagree with her. You're not going to find perfection in your colleagues in the Foreign Service.

*Q: Nor are you going to be perfect.*

MATHEWS: But you can learn a lot from any of them, and as I was saying, when I got to Nigeria, I knew what I had to do. I felt I could put all of my theories into practice and maybe it would work.

But going back to London, in London Bert went to the Imperial Defense College which was a totally British year. That was very good too, because he learned a lot, made friends who were useful. I don't like to use that word, but that's why we were there, to get to know each other, exchange information, exchange ideas. Then we went to Norway for two years. Bert was DCM, with a very fine political Ambassador. That was interesting but I began to find it a little dull after you've served in Third World countries. It wasn't dull exactly, but it was just not exciting.

*Q: I found Oslo to be very clean and healthy.*

MATHEWS: Clean and healthy. I went back last year on a cruise and revisited my old house. Our stay there was a pleasant interlude. I suppose it was good for us. Then we came home. This was before we went to Liberia, these two posts came before Liberia. Then after Liberia, we stayed home for six months or so, then we went to Nigeria. We were there almost six years. It was really a hard post, I suppose, if you look at it in a certain way, but I found it utterly fascinating. They were very friendly people, they were easier to be with than the Liberians.

In Nigeria we went through the Biafra War but we were there two years before the first coup and we were able to travel all over the country when we first went to Nigeria. There was an enormous Peace Corps there, I think it was the largest in the world. We had a very large AID mission, they had stepped up USIS too. It was a big post, lots of people.

I had never felt that I wanted to ask the women to come regularly to [meetings at] the Embassy. I didn't do it in Liberia, but because communication was so difficult I would have one day each week, Wednesday, morning, when anybody could come to see me if

they wanted to, if they needed to talk about something. They could bring their friends, they could bring Liberians. Sometimes it would be one or two, and sometimes it would be 25 or 30.

*Q: Perhaps more?*

MATHEWS: Certainly more in Nigeria. I did the same thing there because it was difficult to get in touch with the people. There was a fairly big business community and we had lots of women in these various agencies. I never made it mandatory, but the official Americans could come once a month. They were so scattered you never got to communicate. They would come, I would sometimes have as many as 100.

*Q: I was just going to ask you about the logistics of not knowing how many people were coming.*

MATHEWS: I had a good staff. We'd serve them coffee and cookies. I had quite a good cook. The staff liked activity, but they needed attention, lots of attention.

*Q: Is there a Third World staff that doesn't?*

MATHEWS: They liked to keep busy. Well, I was friendly with all the Nigerian women who were connected with World Council of Women, Red Cross, all of them, YWCA, a flourishing YWCA. They would come to me and ask for help. So, at these monthly meetings I would say, the YWCA needs such and such. And someone always volunteered, always with the understanding that they kept me informed, that they worked with the Nigerians but did not take over the job and direct it. They got into the spirit of it, they really did.

They were a very good group and some of them were highly educated. I would see everyone that came and it would come out in conversation what they were interested in doing. I was able in so many instances to steer them to a place where they could be really helpful. I don't know why this comes to mind, but there was one woman who was very active in [our] Girl Scouts. The Girl Guides needed a little help and she did a magnificent job there with the understanding that she would not take over any of the responsibility, but would train someone so that when she left it would go on. She did a beautiful job. I remember a couple of teachers who were special. There was so much going on there that I don't think any woman, no matter what her profession couldn't have found something useful to do for the people of the country.

*Q: Of interest to her.*

MATHEWS: Of interest to her, and beneficial to her. Of course, there was a problem; it didn't look very impressive on a resume. I wrote [recommendations for] several of them, who were worried about this sort of thing, who thought they were falling a little bit behind [in their profession], and wished they could have credit for [their work in Nigeria].

Here in Washington I've written some letters to prospective employers to tell them what a person had done. I know a few instances where she got the job.

I'm thinking of our house servants who were not literate, and oh, how they wanted to read. The drivers were not literate either, so with my friend, Lady Ademula, who was President of the Council of Women, we decided that they (the Council) would start some literacy classes and we [Americans] would help them. It took a little doing, but we used the Laubach method [Each one teach one]. It was adapted to teach groups. A team of one Nigerian and one American taught eager people to read and write. We had a large group at the YWCA. I think we had four centers in all. Wives of American businessmen were keen about this, and they all helped. It kept them busy, all of these women plopped down in a culture

*Q: What else is there to do really?*

MATHEWS: Yes, except to get into trouble . There would be one or two who didn't want to do anything, but at the first opportunity I would say, "If this doesn't interest you, don't do it."

*Q: And this is still pre-1972? You did absolutely the right thing, to seek out what interests people had and what they did best.*

MATHEWS: Yes, and I never asked them to make cookies. You know, the whole story about making cookies for parties and things like that. I'm skipping around because I've just got so many memories of Nigeria. We had a beautiful Embassy residence and grounds, on a lagoon, really it was quite beautiful. We would have Thanksgiving service there. All the Americans would come. The musicians would get together and train an adult choir which was very good. They would train a children's choir from the American school which also started while we were there. I really enjoyed that occasion so much. And then on Christmas Eve we'd do the same thing. The choirs would sing, and then we would have a Christmas tree, all out doors, of course. We just all got together. I think it's important in a big place like that, in a country like Nigeria, which was very different for most of the people. They felt very far away from home.

*Q: I do remember them being scattered throughout Lagos.*

MATHEWS: They were, that's why I decided it would be a good idea to give them an opportunity to come in once a month. They'd drive for miles, these women. Actually it was painless for me. The servants loved activities. One of the things I found so exciting was to know people across the board, not just the political people. There's a very fine museum system in Nigeria, a very fine museum system in Lagos itself, others at Ife.

*Q: Kano?*

MATHEWS: Kano did have a museum, that's not the one I am trying to think of. The



British had done very well by them. The British curator of the museum system left while we were there, but he turned it over to a Nigerian who was very good. We had several wives who'd worked in museums here at home. I asked the curator if he would like some help, and he said yes. So these few women, who I am particularly thinking of, who had had real experience, helped get out the first catalogue. That was good for their profession. It was good for everyone concerned.

We had an art collection from the Museum of Modern Art. I let them (MOMA) pick it out for me. There was a delightful young man who took an interest. I gave him measurements of the rooms in the residence, and showed him photographs and so forth. It was a fabulous collection. We invited all of the artists in Lagos that we could round up to the opening. It was the happiest occasion. I can just see them there darting around these paintings. Little groups from schools used to be brought for a little tour. There was one young man, the son of our cultural affairs officer, who was a very good painter. I've got one of his paintings upstairs. He was only 17 at the time, but during the summer he was our "unofficial curator" of the collection and would show people around when we were absent.

*Q: This was part of the Art in Embassies program?*

MATHEWS: Yes, the Museum of Modern Art doesn't do it now. I think that's a pity because the school of art that they represent suits the big, open, light houses of the tropics. We had one enormous Gene Davis. I thought the paintings were very well chosen. They grew on us, and appealed to the Africans. You know, Modern Art had its beginnings in Africa.

*(End of tape 2)*

*Q: Where would you like to start?*

MATHEWS: Well, I'm in your hands. Tell me this, do you propose that we go back to all of my posts and I pick up things that I think I have missed or ....

*Q: We could do that eventually. Could I ask you one question? A while ago we talked about the spouse involvement at posts. I think we were professionals. What kind of professionals were we, and how can that be reflected on these tapes. (Pause) I'm not sure there is an answer .*

MATHEWS: Well, you know, I felt professional, I really did. I tried to do a professional job. When I was president of AAFSW (Association of American Foreign Service Women) here - fantastic women on the Board, very competent, very good. Everything we did we tried to do professionally. I think we surprised a number of people.

*Q: Can I go back now to your first post? Vancouver. If you recall, you said, "I was very frivolous. I played bridge, I just had a wonderful time." Where did this sense of team*

*work, of responsibility, of professionalism develop. How did that grow? Or did you suddenly wake up one day in Sydney and.....*

MATHEWS: No. Frivolous is not the word. I was being a little flip. But I was just trying to fit in with the people that I was associating with.

*Q: That's what we all did*

MATHEWS: Yes, that's what we did. I can't remember. I got to know a lot of people, interesting people.

*Q: You are talking about Canadians?*

MATHEWS: Canadians. It wasn't a large Consulate, and there were some American business [families] there, but mostly we associated with Canadians.

*Q: At the risk of over simplifying, really, your first undertaking, if you want to call it that, as a young Foreign Service wife was to fit in, to calculate, where do I fit into this picture?*

MATHEWS: Yes

*Q: And you did that right from the beginning? Interesting.*

MATHEWS: And, of course, there were so few official Americans there, at that time anyway. We felt intensely proud of being American.

*Q: This was 1935, 36.*

MATHEWS: We were thrilled to be in the Foreign Service, of course, and wanted to do our best.

*Q: Another basic premise here, of course, you were doing it for the country and for the Department. Were you basically doing your best for you husband because you wanted...*

MATHEWS: I suppose so, but I was doing what I wanted to do anyway.

*Q: Oh, wonderful, great.*

MATHEWS: I think it would be the same if you move from one city to another in the United States. You look around. You see where you could fit in. You see what there was to be done that you could do, that interested you and go on from there. We were pretty intense about it all when we began our Foreign Service career.

*Q: Now I am going to skip around. When you were in Afghanistan, was Louis Dreyfus ambassador?*

MATHEWS: Oh, no, we were well before that. Bert went out in 1944, early 1944. I got there in August or September. No, the post had been opened about a year and a half before.

*Q: Was that our first representation in Afghanistan?*

MATHEWS: Yes. (FSO) Charlie Thayer came down from Russia and opened the post. Then they asked Bert if he would go just after we got settled in Alexandria. He said yes. I think that's already recorded in some of my experiences in getting to Afghanistan.

*Q: Yes, and those, I think, are extraordinary.*

MATHEWS: Now, what was your question.

*Q: Just to ask if you knew the Dreyfuses.*

MATHEWS: Oh, no, they came well after. When we got there our Minister, our first minister had just come. He was Cornelius Van H. Engert. I think I mentioned him to you.

*Q: Yes you did*

MATHEWS: His name was Cornelius Van H. Engert. I think I mentioned that Mrs. Engert was not there at the time, so...I could amend that. I said I was the only [American] woman in Afghanistan. But I recall now that there were several American wives of Afghans that we were never allowed to see. You see some of the family, the royal family particularly, would come to the United States to school and they were usually very handsome, cultivated young men and several of them came back with American wives. Now the American wives thought they were marrying a prince, they were coming back to something pretty splendid, but of course, it was not quite like that. A splendid house would be a big rambling mud house and there might be other wives and, I think, it was probably a pretty difficult existence.

*Q: You say that you weren't permitted to see them. Was that because of purdah or because there was just no socializing?*

MATHEWS: No, we were not allowed to see them.

*Q: By the Embassy, by the royal family?*

MATHEWS: By the Afghans. I don't know whether anyone ever made a great effort, but it was not looked upon with any great favor. I can't remember too distinctly, but there were some moves made to get in touch with some of these women, one of them in particular, but I don't think it ever happened.

*Q: It might interest you to know that when my husband was a graduate student at Berkeley, one of the Afghans lived downstairs and he was the leader of the Afghan student community. There were 17 of them and his name was Waly and I can't think of his last name and he was married and he brought his wife with him, but the other 16 were not married and at that point, part of their scholarship condition was that they come back to Afghanistan without a foreign wife.*

MATHEWS: Well, I think that came out of the sad experience of some of these younger women who were perhaps there during our time, that they made this rule. I'm sure they did. A number of countries do that, you know. That you come here to school and you come home.

*Q: Well, yes, because they want you to come home and marry a national wife and pick up the reins of the country in many of the cases. Sometimes those American women married to a national are a very good entree for you. As a western woman were you considered an honorary man as I was in Morocco. Seriously, who did you socialize with and how?*

MATHEWS: Well, I was invited to official dinners and there would be the British minister's wife and me. We always played bridge after dinner. The Afghans were great bridge players. Our minister didn't play bridge, so he would go sit quietly and watch a while and then go home. But we had two bridge foursomes always. Bert would automatically go with his group. They were expert bridge players and my group was Lady Squire, the British minister's wife and the Foreign Minister, the Egyptian chargé d'affaires. We had a very nice time. And, of course, it was such a small group...the official party was so small that we would have been very bored seeing each other night after night if we didn't have this rousing bridge game going all the time. It was fun.

*Q: How did you fill your days?*

MATHEWS: Oh, I had very full days. I had very interesting servants in the house. Marijan, the cook, was very intelligent and wanted to learn western cooking. He thought that was his way up in the world, although he was a wonderful native cook. So usually every morning before I could get to the kitchen, he would come carrying my Fannie Farmer cookbook, knock on the door, "Memsahib, Madam, come". Although I was just learning kitchen Persian...I couldn't speak well, of course, and he spoke no English. He was trying, I was trying.

*Q: He couldn't read the book?*

MATHEWS: Oh, no, he just brought it so that I would communicate with him, I would show him.

*Q: He kept it all in his head, or did he make notes?*

MATHEWS: Well, no, he didn't make notes. But I remember making a great big chart for

him, when he would learn a recipe, when he would get it well in his head, he would write it on the chart in Persian. It was pretty complicated, but he learned so much. I couldn't cook myself. I hadn't had much practice. But I had plenty of pictures from magazines that would come to the Embassy, pictures of cakes, pies, doughnuts and waffles and things like that. So when we would make things, I would use the recipes and the pictures. I was very proud of him because he got to be a pretty good western cook.

*Q: Thanks to you.*

MATHEWS: Thanks to him because he was just that kind of a person. Well, we would have lessons every morning. Also, I was having French lessons, I think three days a week. Then I would walk, it was about three-quarters of a mile to the Legation residence where they had a piano, a very good Beckstein that somehow had survived the climate, I suppose because it was so high and dry. I would practice for about two hours and then Bert would pick me up - the Chancery was just across the garden - and we would walk home to lunch.

I rode a horse in the afternoon. I had a very good horse, part Arabian, and, not too well trained, because when I would lose control completely I could try to aim him toward the hills. He would run up the hill until he tired. But I didn't ride alone. Of course, I always had a Sice (groom) riding with me. I enjoyed the rides so much. Everyone smiled at me. I could ride through the bazaar, the covered bazaar and shop from my horse.

*Q: From horseback? How wonderful!*

MATHEWS: From horseback. See the beggars' bowls? I remember buying those one morning. I bought six of them. I thought they would make good ashtrays. I bought one, and then as I rode along the word got out that someone is buying beggars' bowls, and they were holding out beggars' bowls all along the way; so I came home with six that were dark and encrusted. My servants cleaned them with ashes and through the years they've gotten pretty shiny. That was very enjoyable. I'd ride out towards the British Embassy. Sometimes Lady Squire would ride with me and we would ride beyond the Embassy, through the villages.

*Q: And you were safe?*

MATHEWS: Yes, we were safe.

*Q: Now, the war was still going on?*

MATHEWS: Yes. The Japanese, the daughter of the Japanese minister rode too, but, obviously we couldn't ride together.

*Q: Was Afghanistan a listening post?*

MATHEWS: Yes, when Bert was to go there, they said "It's a listening post". So when people would say, "Why are you going to Afghanistan?"

*Q: Because it is a listening post.*

MATHEWS: Well, it was. It was fascinating because it was tucked there right between Russia and India. Of course, we were friendly, reasonably friendly, with the Russians then. They came to our house, we went to theirs. We had musical evenings when everybody sang. We showed them movies. We didn't have very many, but I remember showing them State Fair. Do you remember State Fair?

*Q: Oh, yes.*

MATHEWS: This was the original State Fair. The Russian ambassador was sitting on the front row, I remember, under a leak in the roof. He was not in a very good position, but he wanted to be up there and it was ping...ping...ping. But he would sit there bridling at the film and saying, "Propaganda. Propaganda."

His wife was a doctor and a very engaging, nice person. She used to borrow my Vogues and had a fur coat made from a picture. Well, I got to know some of them. It was quite evident that they were watching you carefully. The DCM and his wife were really favorites. I know when we went to...when Bert went to Nigeria as Ambassador, we heard that he was the Russian Ambassador. We wanted to get there to see them. We thought it would be wonderful after all these many years to meet in Nigeria, but they left a few months before we got there. And we never saw them. Perhaps it was just as well.

*Q: Feelings had changed a bit between 1944 and 1964.*

MATHEWS: Oh, yes, absolutely. Well...

*Q: I'm fascinated with shopping from horseback in the bazaar. Did your groom go ahead of you and part the way? I envision the....*

MATHEWS: No, I went first.

*Q: You went first. And you just rode... I envision bazaars as being crowded and...*

MATHEWS: Well, they were kind of crowded, but this was usually in the morning as I remember. The groom would be right behind me. People would smile. They made me feel that they were very glad that I was there.

*Q: And did you bargain?*

MATHEWS: Oh, yes, of course. Always. One always offers half, you know. Are you a bargainer?

*Q: Oh, yes. You can't live in any part of the Arab world or Africa without being one.*

MATHEWS: I thought it was a marvelous exercise to bargain. They enjoyed it. I enjoyed it and I'm sure that I didn't do very well several times because they learn how you operate very quickly and probably doubled the price. It was all so cheap anyway. I don't want to get off the subject.

*Q: Stay in Afghanistan.*

MATHEWS: Well, I'm still in Afghanistan, but I was talking about my pleasures, my day in Afghanistan, a typical day. I remember my British friends, Lady Squire and Bunte Pettigrew. There were three women out there part of the time. They would go home for long periods. They would sometimes come to see me in the morning or I would go out and pay them a visit. We would go out there in the afternoon, after work, sometimes to play or watch tennis. We went to the Egyptian Legation often because they were the only ones who had a table tennis set.

What else did we do in the evening? If we got a movie from New Delhi, we would have movies and occasionally - this would be just the European and American group - we would stretch canvas on the floor, bring our records and dance. It was fun, we made our pleasures. We had to.

*Q: Be self reliant*

MATHEWS: Yes, we always played bridge with the Afghans.

*Q: Did you have many...I think since Afghanistan was a relatively new post and a listening post, did you have a lot of congressional delegations?*

MATHEWS: Oh, no, we didn't have any visitors. If anyone came on a visit, I don't think we had more than one or two people. And one was an Army officer.

*Q: And this was an entire tour. How long were you there?*

MATHEWS: Two years.

*Q: From when to when?*

MATHEWS: Well, it was about two years. Let me see, I've got it here. Kabul, '44 to '46. Bert went...well, he was assigned in 1943. He went there in 1944 and we left in late 1945. Well, now, and I can remember when we had a code clerk coming. We were all so excited. Going back just a little bit. We weren't totally alone there. An American couple came when we'd been there for about a year. An older couple, that is, he was in his early 40s then. He had been special assistant to the President of Georgetown University. But

somehow they decided they wanted to go abroad and they were sent to Afghanistan. It turned out they were a most interesting couple and were fascinated with Afghanistan.

Doris was a very good companion, so after she came we would go off on all sorts of excursions together around Kabul, and once we went to...I'm going to stop right there and I'll go to that again. I want to tell you more about my day. I would ride and I was thinking that...this is rather funny. The Afghans had imported elephants a few years before; I don't know how long [ago]. There was only one elephant left in Afghanistan. We would meet it now and then, and it was a very dramatic occasion when I was on my horse.

*Q: Now when you met the elephant, surely that elephant wasn't wandering around loose?*

MATHEWS: Oh, no, it would be on a wide road in Kabul.

*Q: They were using it as a beast of labor, or burden?*

MATHEWS: Yes, it was carrying loads, but I can remember that my horse would rear when the elephant came near. It was fun, excitement, those little things remind me of how I spent my days wandering around on my horse.

*Q: Before we leave Afghanistan, please tell me the story about the camel kicking the Studebaker.*

MATHEWS: Oh, that's when we first came...we were coming through a mountain pass. As I remember, we met this long string of camels. They are surly looking, as you know. We were creeping along, we had just about got by them when one really ferocious, nasty looking camel kicked us with his hind leg. They are powerful, and it made a big dent in our Studebaker.

*Q: In your shiny new Studebaker.*

MATHEWS: Yes, it was so beautiful. It was dark blue and there was no way to remove [the dent]. When we took the car to Calcutta several years later, it was still there.

*Q: I probably should put on the tape that this was during the war and they [Department of State] had done you a special favor to let you buy a car and take it [to Afghanistan]. It survived the voyage all the way up to, I think you said you picked it up in Peshawar.*

MATHEWS: Yes

*Q: And then to have it be kicked in by a camel.*

MATHEWS: Yes. We'd gone through the Khyber Pass, the roads were none too good in those days. In fact, there was hardly a road at all. I'm talking too much about trivial things.



*Q: No, you are not. You're not because you are telling me what you did. You created a life for yourself, and as you said, you had to. You had to make your daily activities because there was no television. There was nothing there ready-made for you, and that is absolutely marvelous for self reliance.*

MATHEWS: There seem to be so many things. There was an Italian chargé who had a ten year old daughter who was quite musical, and while I am not a wonderful pianist, I seemed to be the only one in Kabul who could play the piano at all. So I gave her lessons. That was something I did. I'm trying to think of something else I did that wasn't just because I was having a fine time. Well, we entertained quite a lot. There was a variety of experiences, but that suits me.

*Q: Excitement?*

MATHEWS: Excitement. I like doing different things. I would die of boredom if I had to sit in an office and concentrate on one thing. I like to go from one thing to another and I was just very fortunate to be in a life where I could do that.

*Q: This morning at breakfast..we have friends living with us while they look for a house here, and she is a psychologist, and this morning at breakfast I was explaining that "If you could think of life as an EKG, a perfect EKG that just goes on as we have all seen on our charts, then Foreign Service life would look like a heart attack. Because you either are up here on a high, doing something terribly exciting, or there are those moments when you plunge down, when you wish you were home with your family or something. And really, when I look back on my life, it was a series of peaks and valleys, but mostly peaks and mostly exciting peaks. But it was not a humming along. Do you think that's true of Foreign Service life?"*

MATHEWS: Oh, yes, absolutely.

*Q: I mean, to be that far away from home, and to be as young as you were, there must have been moments when you felt isolated, didn't you? Or maybe you didn't.*

MATHEWS: I don't think I ever did, seriously, because, maybe I mentioned this on the last tape, I get "localitis" very quickly and I settle down, that's my world and I like it there.

*Q: That must be why you enjoyed the Foreign Service so much, and why you were such a good Foreign Service wife.*

MATHEWS: Well, I don't know whether I was or not. Well, Bert liked me [the kind of Foreign Service wife I was].

*Q: Well, you were a good Foreign Service wife. We had supper with Lucy Bergland [Lucy*

*Bergland, a retired personnel officer, served in Rotterdam with the Fenzis and in Lagos with Ambassador and Mrs. Mathews] just the other evening, and I said I was going to talk to you again today. She said, "How marvelous, they were the nicest people I served with."*

MATHEWS: Really, did she?

*Q: Yes, she did say that.*

MATHEWS: Well, she's a wonderful person herself.

*Q: Yes, she is a dear.*

MATHEWS: She was very sweet to say that.

*Q: Could we leave your days in Afghanistan. Let's leap ahead now to your days in Nigeria where you really had much more responsibility. The reason I would like to do that is because..oh, is there something else you wanted to tell me first?*

MATHEWS: Yes, while we're still on Kabul. You asked me who I associated with. Well, I've told you part of it. But I wasn't cut off altogether from the Afghan women. Legally, I was not supposed to be visiting them or they me. But some of our good Afghan friends, I remember the Chief of Protocol particularly, a wonderful man, smuggled me in to see his wife several times and I'm sure that everybody from the King down knew he was doing it because it's a very close Royal family. But I would go to see this very sophisticated woman. The whole family would be beautifully dressed. My goodness, she was certainly better dressed than I was. The Royal family did go abroad now and then. When they were in Paris, they bought beautiful clothes. I remember she didn't speak English, but I was working on my French and we got along quite well in French. I went to see her several times. Did I tell you this before?

*Q: No, no.*

MATHEWS: And our landlord, who lived just back of us, had a very interesting wife. He spoke English and would drop in on us quite a lot. Occasionally he would get a message to me, that if I could be in the garden in the back at a certain time, he would bring his wife out on the roof and we would have a conversation. He interpreted, I really enjoyed that. She really couldn't say very much, but during the time that women, that brief time when women were out of purdah, Amanullah's time.

*Q: I remember that.*

MATHEWS: She was the leading Afghan woman. That made it very, very interesting. We couldn't talk about anything terribly important, but we did talk. She would send me a meal every now and then, make a special pilau, and that was nice. I think they were the

only Afghan women I had contact with there. I met a number of them when we came home as the Afghan Embassy was in SOA. I did get to know some of the wives. I'm afraid...I'm not sure that they're alive since the first coup, which was five or six years ago. They kind of disappeared.

*Q: What is SOA?*

MATHEWS: South Asian Affairs. You see, when we came back from India which was a bit later, there was a new office in the State Department which they called South Asian Affairs. It was India and Pakistan, new Pakistan of course, Afghanistan, Ceylon, Burma at that time. Bert, because of his experience in India - and not many people had experience in India - was made Director. So that when we got to know some of the Afghan women, we had previously only seen their feet!

*Q: You knew them by their feet.*

MATHEWS: Yes

*Q: Did they decorate them with henna like Moroccan women.*

MATHEWS: No, it was very intriguing because they would wear beautiful shoes. Two women were all I got to know while I was there, that I met is a better word, because I really didn't get to see enough of them to get to know them, and we couldn't see each other freely. But I couldn't help noticing, or I thought I noticed, that the women of Afghanistan were a pretty powerful force even then.

*Q: Behind those veils and those mud walls it really was matriarchal?*

MATHEWS: Yes, I feel that it was. Of course things have changed for them. I don't know what's going on now, but they did come out of purdah for a while later. But I don't know what's happening there now to them, or their husbands either. But I did feel that...are we finishing with Afghanistan?

*Q: Whatever. I was just going to make a comment. In all the news clips that you see of the Afghan rebels fighting, I don't remember seeing women fighting side by side as you did in the Caribbean and Latin America.*

MATHEWS: No, I don't think it was the usual thing.

*Q: So what do you suppose they're doing?*

MATHEWS: Perhaps they are farming, or they are trying? Afghanistan is a pretty country when you get out of Kabul. I think I mentioned you see nothing but mud walls as you go, but it's pretty inside the walls.

*Q: And you said with the irrigation...*

MATHEWS: Yes, they are wonderful gardeners and they raise magnificent roses. I remember the Court Minister every year would have a party to show us his roses. He would invite us to tea and show us the roses. And then the Royal family's summer palaces were in a place called Paghman which was I suppose, ten miles outside the city and they had very beautiful gardens.

*Q: It must be the altitude, but there's not much moisture, not much rain, so they had to irrigate.*

MATHEWS: Yes, they irrigate. Oh, yes, they have a fine irrigation system. Bert was tied down there and he couldn't go on [long trips], maybe a day or two. But I went on several with the group from the British Embassy and my friend Doris. We took a wonderful trip out of Kabul. There is a road that goes north from Kabul and it goes to the Russian border and then...well, one of the roads goes [off] to a place called Bamian which before Genghis Kahn came down and destroyed everything was a great Buddhist center. Enormous Buddhas were carved in the cliff side, one was 150 feet high. There were several others. One stayed in a rest house and looked across a little valley and there were these huge Buddhas on the other side. They'd been mutilated by Genghis Kahn. I know that the big Buddha had his nose cut off. There would be little caves dotting off the other side where the monks had lived.

We were very venturesome in those days. We climbed up and got on top. There was this little path to the top of the Buddha's head. You know, it's kind of an incredible memory, sitting there, and it was night, too, sitting there in the bright moonlight on top of the Buddha's head.

*Q: It sounds like Passage to India.*

MATHEWS: Yes, wonderful memory. Let's see. Well, that was a nice trip. There were little plots on the mountainsides. The Afghans are masters of irrigation.

*Q: They were just little individual farmers?*

MATHEWS: Yes.....irrigating. They were so nice, cheerful, and self-reliant, proud and I feel I was there long enough to know something of their character and I'm not surprised that they just don't give up, ever.

*Q: I'm finding that, as I did, you found the interest, the color, the emotions, not necessarily in the sophisticated Embassy scene, but it's out there in the country. It's there with your servants. I feel we had an advantage over our husbands because they were in the office, and there was not much difference between Morocco and Curaçao when you are an economic officer. We were the ones who really got out.*

MATHEWS: Yes, and mingled.

*Q: And, really, I could always manage the language. We had different vocabularies, my husband and I. Mine was kitchen and his was economic. I think I can safely say he understood all the languages better than I did because he read so much. But I really did want to speak, and I was out there communicating, whether it was to buy eggplant or whatever.*

MATHEWS: Exactly. Well, you know, it was very complicated. They have two languages, Persian and Pushtu. My household were Persian speaking, so I learned kitchen Persian and got along with French. Most of the officials, the Afghans who we met officially, spoke French or English. In those days you weren't given time to learn a language before you went.

*Q: Picked it up on the spot.*

MATHEWS: I jotted down "women" because I didn't want to forget to tell you about women in Afghanistan. They were really magnificent. I'm thinking of the ones I knew here in Washington. I think there were three or four in the Embassy here. The Ambassador and I had sat together at dinner in Afghanistan practically every time we went out. He didn't speak English at that time, but we spoke French.

We talked about horses all the time. That seemed to be our subject, so I had a pretty good vocabulary on horse raising and horse riding at that time. He, Prince Naim, was the brother of the king. He was killed. I think she, Princess Zohra, escaped to Europe. Anyway, that's the rumor. But the others I don't know. Their husbands are no longer with us. It's very sad. That's happened to us quite a lot in our Service. That is one of the real sadnesses that a number of people that we associated with have been...

*Q: Snuffed out by the opposition.*

MATHEWS: Yes, but that's the world now. I am just full of memories of Afghanistan; I could go on and talk all day, but I won't do that.

*Q: It's entirely up to you, if you are more comfortable with Afghanistan.*

MATHEWS: No, it's not that. It's just that I get wound up and it's rather frustrating to talk about it because...I realize now that there's so much that I don't know about it. I didn't really, really travel very much. I just didn't really get to see all of Afghanistan.

*Q: When we are only there for a few years and it takes a while to absorb the culture to really begin functioning, I think, and there's no way we could ever know all about it.*

MATHEWS: I remember the trip when we left Afghanistan. We went out the way we came in, in the blue mangled car, and the command car and a jeep. It took us two days,

although I suppose it wasn't more than nine or ten hours of real driving. There were things to hold you up, [such as] Jalalabad, which was a city of flowers. Leaving Kabul you would go through the Latiband Pass and then into Khyber Plain and then to the river, the Kabul River Gorge, which was beautiful, you know. The road was narrow, there were cliffs on either side. We had to stop each place and see officials and finally one gets to Peshawar. So tired, always so tired.

*Q: No air conditioning in the cars in those days.*

MATHEWS: No, not at all. We carried towels. When we get some water, we usually wrap a towel around our head. You know, I suppose having traveled back in the days when travel was really venturesome, I am not terribly excited about getting on a plane.

*Q: Nor am I.*

MATHEWS: And flying all night and arriving some...

*Q: I think one of the differences is, that the Service is not as much fun today as it was. You came in 21 years before we did. Now, to be packed economy class into a plane, and be hurtled from A to B, instead of going by car or ship or whatever and having a leisurely voyage getting there. It's not the same. All you've done is travel from A to B and you've been waited on by a stewardess who spoke English and you've had a mediocre airplane meal. And then, "whambo," you are dumped in New Delhi or Bangkok or wherever. It's not the same.*

MATHEWS: No, it's not the same. And it's nice to come home slowly.

*Q: It gives you a chance to unwind. You rest.*

MATHEWS: Mail, at best, came once a week. Things arrived from New Delhi, and they arrived months old. I heard from my family once a month, maybe, if lucky. And we....I'm getting a little off the ...

*Q: Well, you also said you were isolated which you didn't realize.*

MATHEWS: No. Well, as I said, they say it's something one should guard against, being too attached. My parents must have....it must have been awfully hard to see their daughter go trotting off in war time. But of course there were all sorts of people's children who were behaving like that at that time. But there was nothing they could do about it. Where were we?

*Q: Actually we were just talking about the isolation in Afghanistan, but I think you've just answered that; how you just immersed yourself in what was going on around you.*

MATHEWS: Yes, there were Germans there, but we didn't associate with them.

*Q: With the Germans.*

MATHEWS: But a part of our little international group, a very good part of it was a band of refugees from Europe They were Jewish, most of them. And they were of course.....

*Q: Educated people who had managed to flee?*

MATHEWS: Oh, yes, very. Well, you know, I used to be .... I couldn't play very well. I really wasn't that wonderful a pianist, but I did practice a lot and I suppose I did play better than I ever did. But I remember this wonderful couple, just past middle age.

*Q: Seemed old at the time.*

MATHEWS: Oh, yes. They used to ask me to play for them. You see this whole group was always included in all of our international gatherings, you know, our little dances, movies and things like that.

*Q: This was all in English or French?*

MATHEWS: I think most of them spoke English and French. I can remember this one couple particularly that I liked so much. I can't think of their names. But they were so sweet and so kind and making the best of a bleak existence. I suppose they were glad to be alive.

*Q: What did they do for income? Did they manage to bring enough out with them?*

MATHEWS: I think they did. They brought their jewelry and things like that. I don't remember how they did live. Oh, my French teacher was a refugee. I forget his nationality.

*Q: How in the world did these people end up in Kabul, Afghanistan?*

MATHEWS: I don't know. Maybe it was the only place that would take them. I really don't know. They would have had to come through India, and get up there somewhere. I do not know. That's something that I don't know that I ever thought about while I was there. They were there, they were wonderful people.

*Q: When we were in Recife, Brazil, some of the Bahais from Iran were fleeing and one family, or one couple, got to Recife and then the others started coming. That must have happened there, too.*

MATHEWS: I suppose that's what happened.

*Q: But you do have to wonder how the first one got there.*

MATHEWS: I remember now...I was thinking of the colorful people. There was the enormous man, Mr. Fite, a refugee and in some sort of business, an entrepreneur. He had been the heavy weight champion boxer of Czechoslovakia at one time. But we all simply loved him, particularly when we would have a proper dance. The only sprung floor in Afghanistan was at the British Legation. He was, like most big men, a wonderful dancer and when we would dance a Viennese waltz, he would spin you like a top down the room and then unwind you coming back. We three or four women vied with each other to dance with Mr. Fite.

*Q: And he was the boxer?*

MATHEWS: He had been the heavy weight boxer. The champion of Czechoslovakia at one time. Now I suppose he was a man in his forties then.

*Q: Do you know my husband would not take me to my graduation ball at Berkeley. So someone else asked me and I said, "All right, I'll go with you." And he was a boxer. And we got on the dance floor and, poor thing, I can't even remember his name now. He said, "You know, I don't know how to dance. I'm just going to move around this dance floor like I move around the boxing ring.", and that's exactly what he did and he was a wonderful dancer.*

MATHEWS: Isn't that interesting. Someone had taught Mr. Fite. I've never forgotten it. We all loved it. That is Bunte, my two British friends, and Doris and me. I suppose there were four women there at that time.

*Q: It sounds like such a very close knit homogeneous community. What do we say about post morale when you're in a hardship post and you're on your own, self reliant, all pulling together. There certainly seems to be a case of that.*

MATHEWS: Oh, yes, we were all very, very close and we remained close.

*Q: But that was, my goodness, almost forty years ago.*

MATHEWS: Yes, time for people to get older, isn't it.

*Q: Thirty-eight years ago. Should we leap ahead? I think it would be an interesting contrast, now, to leap ahead. It seems to me from our last conversation that your time in Nigeria was more interesting than your time in Liberia.*

MATHEWS: It was different. I think that in a way it was my most interesting post of all.

*Q: Let's leap ahead to how you....what was your role there as an ambassador's spouse? You did mention to me before that it brought out all of your impresario instincts, which I thought was a lovely way to put it.*



MATHEWS: Well, it did. Of course when we went to Nigeria we'd been in the Service quite a long time, and we had, for a person like me, the good luck of being thrown in positions where I had responsibilities far beyond my status. You know, the.....

*Q: Training or what ever.*

MATHEWS: Yes.

*Q: I don't think status is the word we want there. [What you did] was far beyond what was ever expected of us.*

MATHEWS: Expected of us. What I was really thinking of now was when Bert was a lowly Vice Consul, I was getting to be the Consul General's hostess, which is not usual. I had a lot of practice that many people aren't lucky enough to have.

*Q: That's beautiful, and that's the beautiful thing about some of the small posts you were in. You get so much more experience and so much in touch with the country.*

MATHEWS: Yes, and not to dwell on Afghanistan, but there we were young, but Bert was DCM. It gave us a lot of responsibility.

*Q: But that says something about his abilities, too.*

MATHEWS: Well, I don't know. I thought he was terrific myself. He was a good officer, but it was chance, a lot of it.

*Q: Some of it is luck. [One of our interviewees] said of her husband, "He was just lucky. He was just in the right place at the right time." And you know there's a great deal more to his career, a great deal more. But there is a certain element of truth [in the luck].*

MATHEWS: Oh, yes, it's true. It is so true and she meant that.

*Q: But you also have to be looking out for the opportunity. Because as a Foreign Service Officer you're dealing with a lot of other intelligent, bright ambitious, accomplished people and if you let the opportunity slip away from you, someone else is going to grab it. So you see, it wasn't all luck. I'm sorry I didn't know your husband because everyone speaks so highly of him.*

MATHEWS: Oh, he was a wonderful man. Prejudiced, of course, but he was.

*Q: From what you tell me, I think he must have been very supportive of you.*

MATHEWS: Oh yes, he was. He, somehow he always made me feel important.

*Q: How nice.*

MATHEWS: It was.

*Q: Did he, excuse me, I shouldn't have interrupted you. Would he come home and say we have to have twelve people for dinner? Or would he come home and say, "Would you mind another dinner party tonight for twelve?" Maybe that is an over simplification, but that indicates the relationship between my husband and me. It very rarely was we have to do this or that. It was more that the opportunity is there, and it is to our benefit to do it. Am I making myself clear?*

MATHEWS: Oh yes, I understand.

*Q: Did you have that kind of relationship with him? I think it's the only one, really.*

MATHEWS: Yes, oh, I think so too. Well, it's as I always said about the famous Directive, you just can't pin any of these things down. You cannot generalize. Foreign Service women are so different, posts are so different.

*Q: And so much of it depends upon the relationship between the spouses.*

MATHEWS: Yes, most of it depends upon how you and your husband feel about each other and, well, I don't know. No solution [to the spouse issue.]

*Q: My husband now is being very supportive of this Project. It's almost as if he is in a small way repaying me for all that I did [for thirty years].*

MATHEWS: Bert was like that. He was at the Foreign Service Institute and Coordinator of the Senior Seminar when I was President of AAFSW. But he supported me even though I had to, not neglect him, but I had to give [AAFWS] priority a lot of the time. He understood that it does not last forever.

*Q: And that was the last, was really the last thing you did wasn't it, in the Service?*

MATHEWS: Yes, yes.

*Q: And you went right to that from Nigeria?*

MATHEWS: No, let's see. We came home. He went directly over to the Institute. I didn't do anything that first year, but get settled in the house and travel with them when I could. Because I wanted to reacquaint myself with my country, too. It was really quite marvelous because you go...well, one example was we went to Chicago. Mayor Daley showed us his government, the workings of the city. We went into New York, I remember going to...of course I had been to the UN, but the Stock Exchange, well, all of the things that are important to the United States. We went to California, I remember we visited farms. We

were in Los Angeles, and we visited all sorts of interesting things there. We'd usually meet the Mayor and all of the people of the establishment in each place.

*Q: How fortunate that you could go along. That must have been great fun.*

MATHEWS: Oh, yes. Oh, it was. Wives were invited to go, of course you had to pay your own way. There was one wife who went everywhere, took all of the trips along with me. But some of them had little children. Some of them were tired...most of them had just come in from a post, you know, or doing something else. I'm getting off the track, what are we talking about?

*Q: Well, we started on Nigeria. I thought it would be interesting to compare your daily activities, your outlook, your responsibilities in Nigeria to your earlier [posts].*

MATHEWS: Well, there is no comparison. I think most posts were totally different.

*Q: Perhaps what I am searching for is a comparison of your responsibilities, in your attitudes toward your position as Ambassador's spouse. Maybe that's what I'm looking for.*

MATHEWS: Well, I don't know how to begin. It was a big house, the Residence, have you been there?

*Q: I remember going to the economic officer's, and I remember going to a Japanese restaurant. But it seems that there must have been a big reception. I think that we determined at the last interview that you were not there at the time. So possibly the DCM gave a reception for us, or something. But I don't have a clear picture.*

MATHEWS: Well, the Scotts would have been in charge, Ken Scott would have been in charge. And there wasn't anyone living in the house. So maybe if we weren't there, we were coming very shortly. So there wasn't anyone there. Well, it was, housekeeping was...

*Q: A challenge.*

MATHEWS: It was a challenge. But we had good servants; most of them had been there for quite a long time. Tom was the head steward, but there were a lot of people. I was talking about this a few days ago because my help here, my housekeeper, had a terrible nose bleed. And I really got scared. I had an awful time trying to get it stopped, and I was dashing in to try to get myself together so that I could get in a taxi and take her [to the hospital] when we finally stopped it.

But it took me back to Nigeria where I had a little Red Cross kit. Because one of that little group of house and garden people was always hurting himself all the time. And I would get out the little bag and bind him up.

*Q: And bind them up. How many people did you have working for you?*

MATHEWS: Well, let's see. Two downstairs boys, two upstairs, two in the kitchen and a helper. And the laundry boy, sometimes two, because we had a lot of laundry because we had visitors, and we entertained a lot. We had these huge tablecloths that had to be done. And the napkins and of course the servants uniforms. Four full time gardeners because we had a big garden. It was quite expensive.

And then the driver. They were good, but you had to show an interest all the time. You could not relax and think that everything was going to go well. There was no guarantee. Sometimes they would do a dinner perfectly. Of course, the table was long and we had so many people that there would be two or three services at dinner. And they could do it beautifully if they were on their toes. And I would be so proud of them but let me relax, let me relax and think, I won't look into this, I won't ask about this, I won't go into the kitchen, they could let me down so that I could cry.

So I developed a routine. I would always see the cook in the morning, go down to the kitchen in the morning and talk with him. Well, if we were having a dinner party, I would always check in late in the afternoon, taste the soup or do something like that. Ask about this and that. Well, we need appreciation, they need it, certainly Joseph did. So you had to go down and praise him a little bit.

*Q: That's just good management. I wonder if you were aware at the time that you were really conducting a business. You had thirteen people working for you, and you had to bind their little wounds. You had to show appreciation of their soup. That's what the corporate world is all about on a much grander scale, getting people to produce for you, and you did it.*

MATHEWS: Yes, sometimes I sit down and think, well, that went pretty well, and kind of give myself a little pat.

*Q: Were they literate, any of them?*

MATHEWS: Well, that brings me to another...I may have talked about that [in the last interview]. They were not, but Joseph, we communicated and he could read a little bit. None of the others could. They were all getting older and when we started the literacy classes, I think I talked about that....

*Q: That if a Nigerian organization asked you to volunteer, [you did it] in a passive way, not to be chair or head up something.*

MATHEWS: Yes, I've got some wonderful pictures I could show you, of a Nigerian and an American teaching these young people. Not all of them were young, they were adult, to read. They were so eager. And then we set up one [a class] over at a midwifery center on the island, that you would have seen from where you were staying in Lagos. Mothers

who brought their children to be examined would try to learn to read. And I know they had a little sewing class, taught them all the terminology of sewing.

And then we branched out to the young wives of the military. An American woman and an aggressive Nigerian woman went out knocking on doors. "Would you like to learn to read?" And the eldest wife, or the grandmother would then say to one, "You go." It was quite a good response. I've got a wonderful picture of a graduation. The Americans did a lot of the work, because they knew more about it and they had more time, but the Nigerians were there, and they were helping. It was their project. I don't know what's become of it, but a lot of people were taught to read.

That was very gratifying, in more ways than one. It was a big post, you know. AID was enormous. Lots of women. There were contract people. There was the Ford Foundation, all sorts of women there. Most of them were highly educated women, and they took to this. There were teachers from the American business [community] and these various educational groups. That was the time that Nigeria was the shining country of Africa and a success story in independence. I suppose it still is, but it is going through rough times. We had a lot of people in the Peace Corps, the emphasis was on teacher training.

*Q: Your volunteer work was an extension our government policy at the time.*

MATHEWS: We had that in mind. You know American women are so wonderful because...we talked it over...and most of them understood what we were doing. What we were after. What sort of help we wanted to give. Our help should be right in line with our policies. To help people help themselves.

*Q: Which is the answer.*

MATHEWS: We really tried to keep quiet about it. I mean not to advertise anything. I didn't think any of the men, the official Nigerians knew very much about what the American women were doing, but they did. I realized that when Bert went on his rounds to say goodbye. They all mentioned the American women. Someone asked if he knew how much they helped.

*Q: Great.*

MATHEWS: Well, yes, it made me feel good. One doesn't want to intrude. One doesn't want to take their jobs. Particularly at that time there were a lot of useful things to do that helped us, helped them. This just popped into my mind...I'm still in touch with a woman. She's with UNESCO now. She was head of a big midwifery center in Lagos. I remember seeing her and saying I'd like to come see what you're doing one of these days. She was pleased. I got up early one morning and went. I was horrified, but I shouldn't have been. There was a whole television crew there. She was making the most of the interest of the American Ambassador's wife. I didn't blame her, but I was taken aback. I have got lots of photographs of Nigeria, they were keen photographers, and the photographs all tell me

something about [moments like this].

*Q: Having photographs of your activities in Nigeria would be wonderful.*

MATHEWS: Yes, and there are so many memories. As we talk more and more come to mind, and I could go on and on. I think, however, that it is time for this interview to end.

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MATHEWS: I brought out several things that I want to include.

*Q: Fine.*

MATHEWS: I have two annual reports and they tell a great deal.

*Q: Let me put those right in here. They're going to go into...side by side with the interview.*

MATHEWS: It's been an orderly progression, the AAFSW. The emphasis then was on service and community affairs. We had, you will see in these reports, eighteen flourishing projects.

*Q: All community service?*

MATHEWS: Not all together. It was a marvelous group. A great many women worked hard. We had speakers in the schools.

*Q: Was that to explain to the Foreign Service children or outsiders?*

MATHEWS: Outside children. We still do a lot in the schools. This group was cooperating with various organizations in Washington, including the Junior League. Of course we still have the language desk. We had hospital visitors. Everybody helped. We made the Department shape up on the transportation. The emphasis was different. The emphasis now is mostly on jobs.

*[ Ms. Mathews and Ms. Fenzi are scanning the reports.]*

*Q: Some of these things do still exist, but the emphasis has changed. We'll put these in here at the end of your career. It's really the climax of your career.*

*[Ms. Mathews and Ms Fenzi are looking through photos.]*

MATHEWS: This is Sue Parsons. She was very young. She was on the board both years. Claire Caochran was absolutely wonderful. She had been Warren Magnussen's secretary before she married. When they went abroad she always kept her hand in. She was

secretary of the Fulbright Commission wherever they were and kept up her skills. I could dictate something to her in the morning, she would have it in the mail that afternoon, and I would get it the next morning mail.

*Q: I wanted to ask you a little more about Betty Carp so that we could identify her in that picture. Would she be considered the administrative assistant? What was her role exactly at that time? It was a Legation in Istanbul at that time wasn't it?*

MATHEWS: Not when we were there it was a Consulate General. You know the person to ask about her would be the Grew sisters, about her early days.

*Q: Well, they did mention her, but just what a marvelous person she was, and the consulate couldn't have run without her.*

MATHEWS: We all felt that way. She was technically a secretary, until they brought her into the Foreign Service as a vice-consul. She went on doing everything for everybody. She was every ambassador's, every consul general's assistant and advisor. Not on the record, of course. She knew the country and the people so well.

*Q: I believe she's the one that Elsie (Grew Lyon) said started at eighteen, very young. And served for how many years?*

MATHEWS: Well, let's see, she must have retired about 1970, maybe before that, she was getting on.

*Q: She must have been a refugee from the Russian Revolution. Of course, she could have been a child.*

MATHEWS: That's right. She didn't talk much about herself. She was just one of those people who took care of other people and didn't want any attention herself. It was pretty hard getting anything out of her about it.

*Q: I have a little note from the last time we talked about being pinched on Pera?*

MATHEWS: Pera. Yes, Pera was a busy street and she was always afraid someone was going to pinch a visitor, so she would go along to make sure that they didn't.

*Q: And just briefly to go back to Afghanistan, we didn't get this on tape when we talked last time. You said, perhaps, a little more hair-raising, was when packs of wild dogs would nip at the horses' heels. We were talking about when you met the elephant, and you said, perhaps, a little more hair-raising. Does this mean that there were packs of wild dogs?*

MATHEWS: There weren't really packs, maybe three or four usually and I don't know how fierce they were. They looked awfully fierce. They would bark even when you would

be out in a jeep or a car.

*Q: Was your horse accustomed to them? Were they shy or bold?*

MATHEWS: Oh, yes, we noticed it.

*Q: Understatement, I think that is.*

MATHEWS: I hadn't been, what's the word? Once bitten, twice shy. I hadn't been bitten yet.

*Q: Fortunately for everyone. Now, tell me which came first, Oslo or Turkey? In your career. Turkey?*

MATHEWS: Turkey.

*Q: Turkey. And I've always thought that that would be a very exotic place.*

MATHEWS: Well, it was. I have said a little about it, haven't I?

*Q: There's very little in the transcript about Turkey.*

MATHEWS: I remember when I was reading it just a few days ago. I said we had a lot of unfinished business there because we were so terribly busy with visitors and social occasions. We didn't travel as much as we'd like, although we were in Izmir. We went to Ankara a number of times. And this was a time when the Turks and the Greeks were getting along fairly well. It was a time of peace and Paul and Frederika came for a visit and we had a wonderful time. Roses thrown in the street. When we started this interview, I realized I wasn't going to say anything about the political situation. We Foreign Service wives are really in a position to know a lot and to hear a lot and to sense the atmosphere of the place. That's not our job to analyze or talk about it. And so, while there may have been a great deal going on in Turkey, and I think there was, I only saw the surface of it. I think you'd better cut all of that out.

*Q: No, this is extremely important because the impression that is given in these tapes, a number of these tapes, is that really, the wives were not aware of what the husbands were doing and what was going on, but they were and they just all knew that they had to be discreet at the time.*

MATHEWS: I think that you can't help it.

*Q: You can't help it, you have to absorb what's going on.*

MATHEWS: You have to. There wasn't time for Bert to sit down and report to me every day, even if he felt inclined, which of course he didn't. But, I did sit by top officials at



dinner very frequently. We didn't talk about politics, of course. I remembered something Miss Bassell told me. When you're sitting beside a very important official don't try to talk seriously to him, he wants to enjoy himself. I know how she meant it. I would never have thought of bringing up political matters or a serious matter unless they did and then I would try to be very discreet. It was interesting to sit by these people and get to know them as people, as a person and know what kind of person they are.

I can remember the prime minister of, I don't know how I'm getting on this, but I am. You just set me off. The prime minister of Nigeria, I remember being at an intimate dinner with him. I remember the invitation. This woman was the first woman doctor in Nigeria, and the family, which was quite extensive, were very close to the prime minister, old, old friends. She called me one day and said, "Will you come to dinner on Sunday night?" and I said, "You know we would like to but I don't know whether we can or not. Usually we are very quiet on the weekend." And she said, "Well, I'd like you to come, the prime minister is coming."

So, I sat by him that evening and we chatted about such things as air conditioning. It was so hot, but he didn't want it in his bedroom. And I said I don't think that's a very good idea. And I told him how we had it arranged. We had it in the next room and the air circulated. We talked about things like that. He was so sweet and normal and simple. We were just talking about everyday things. Two weeks later he was assassinated. I cried. I cried because had gotten to know him as a real person. Not everybody I sat by was assassinated. Occasionally, if something was very important, the man on my right and the man on my left would talk across me and I would hear or sense things.

*Q: And then take that back to your husband?*

MATHEWS: No, no I really didn't. I didn't make a point of rushing to say, oh, I heard this and that. But I did get a sense of the political atmosphere.

*Q: What was the dinner party language in Istanbul? Turkish? Or English? French?*

MATHEWS: French and English. I can remember the top general in Istanbul couldn't speak a word of English, but he was such a nice man. He used to always bring me or send me presents, after a dinner of these ladies' red tipped cigarettes. I didn't smoke. But my husband loved to tell this story because I worked very hard at Turkish, trying to be able to say a few words to people like that who loved to come to parties. I was sitting on the yellow sofa in the drawing room, and he said something to me. I don't remember whether I understood it to well, or not, but I kept trying to say you're very kind.

A Turk who spoke English quite well doubled up with laughter. Finally I asked, "What am I saying to the general?" He said, "You were saying 'you are kind to me like a mother.' That's one of the hazards of not speaking the language too well and trying very hard. But most of them spoke English pretty well, and we had other guests who could interpret if one got into a real bind.

*Q: It's difficult because you can't relate it to anything else, can you? I was going to ask you, because you gave me such a nice description of how you spent your days in Kabul, Afghanistan. How did you spend your days in Istanbul?*

MATHEWS: In Turkey? Well, we lived in a very grand house, a palace. It had been the Legation before it became the Consulate General. The offices were in a wing that went entrance, marble stairs. There was a huge ballroom I would have to walk across. To the left there was the dining room and straight across the ballroom and over to another wing was our suite. It was quite incredible. We had a very good staff.

*Q: So to get home to your suite you had to walk through this magnificent ballroom, up marble steps and what have you?*

MATHEWS: Up marble steps, across the ballroom and over to our enormous bedroom. You could sit up in bed and look out on Golden Horn. It was really very romantic and exciting. But there was a lot of work. I had a telephone down to the kitchen from my bedroom. When we were well organized, I would pick up the telephone and say there are people at the airport and we will have 12 or 18 or 30 to dinner. And this marvelous chef-a-Greek, but Paris trained-would get very, very excited. We would plan the menu over the telephone. He would send someone off to the market and produce marvelous, marvelous meals. His specialty was a chocolate souffle [which came] up the dumbwaiter and across the ballroom, arriving at table at the right moment, this was good, except that all the servants were very temperamental, always fighting.

*Q: Among themselves?*

MATHEWS: Yes. I would go down to the kitchen at least once a day to talk to Lagos.

It's the only time in our time in the Foreign Service that we really had a top-notch cook and well-trained servants. It was a miracle with the kitchen underneath our bedroom, two flights down.

*[ Tape interrupted ]*

*Q: Did we get the part about the dishes coming up by dumbwaiter and the servants having to carry them?*

MATHEWS: Yes, it really was a miracle how they did it.

*Q: How they carried it all the way across the ballroom.*

MATHEWS: But they were very quick

*Q: It must get rather chilly in Turkey. How in the world did you ever heat a place like*

*that? Or did you just heat certain portions?*

MATHEWS: It was chilly and damp. Now that you ask me, I don't know how it was heated. We didn't have fireplaces. I don't know. Maybe it wasn't. Maybe we didn't have heat.

*Q: Maybe you didn't need it. That must have been the building that the Grews lived in as a residence.*

MATHEWS: It was, yes, it was. As I say we entered this elegant palace, and straight ahead would be Betty Carp's office. Bert's office was off to the left. The consulate was to the right, an extension. People coming to the consulate would always go straight back. You see I just ran on and on, so stop me. You asked how I spent my day. I remember it was so different. We had so many visitors and people staying in the house. We had, goodness, I can remember we put up nine one night on the third floor, it was a group that had flown in from Yugoslavia. We could put up many, many people. We had two or three quite nice guest rooms. The others weren't all that wonderful.

I remember one congressman, Bert would always politely invite them to stay with us, and usually they did. But he said, no, he didn't want to put us out. He would stay in a hotel. I can remember that we got a call in the middle of the night saying, "Come and get me!" I can remember the look on his face. Well, the hotels were none too good then. I don't know what happened, but he was very uncomfortable. He was glad to come stay in the consulate. He was the nicest guest, Manny Sellars, did you ever hear of Sellars, a long time ago. I remember he sat around playing the piano all the time.

He's the one that picked up the silver once at a meal and said, "This is yours isn't it?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Is all this yours?" and I said, "Yes." He said, "I think that's terrible. I'm going to do something about it." Of course, we did furnish most of our own things, even in the embassies at that time. Nothing happened straight away, but he may have planted a seed when he came home. It was expensive to run a busy consulate with lots of visitors, which we did. We would have unexpected visitors who expected to be taken care of well. It was a blessing to have this marvelous cook.

*Q: And staff, because that eases the burden considerably. You like to oversee and you are, as you say, an impresario by nature. You seem to really enjoy all of these things, which some wives seem to consider a burden.*

MATHEWS: I did. It depends on how you are made.

*Q: I wonder if it depends on how you are made, or if it depends on your attitude toward the Service, or your spouse's attitude toward you as a teammate or whatever. I wonder. Do you think its because we're all different that we all react differently.*

MATHEWS: I think there's a lot in that.

*Q: Because I have actually interviewed one woman who was an ambassador's spouse, maybe twice, and I think the entire Foreign Service was an unhappy experience for her, for thirty years. How sad.*

MATHEWS: Yes, how sad. I think I was lucky; I liked it. It's the kind of thing I try to do, in some way, when I'm home.

*Q: And all of these congressional visitors -- to entertain them, was there some sort of fund or was that out of your pocket?*

MATHEWS: Well, I remember we went in the hole, we spent quite a bit of our own money in Turkey, yes.

*Q: Where do you draw the line on something like that? The one time my husband was in charge of a consulate, I have to say, we had all the funds we needed. But when you find yourself being out of pocket like that, how do you draw the line? What is the straw that would break the camel's back? Did you ever have a limit that you were just not willing to go beyond? Or did that just all play out...?*

MATHEWS: No, I don't know that we thought much about it. We just accepted it. We didn't think it was right, but we went ahead and did it. Of course, not having three or four children to educate, we, probably, could afford it better than some people.

*Q: But, did the time ever come when you said, now Bert, we can't do that. We can't afford that.*

MATHEWS: No, maybe it wasn't that bad. We've never felt that we've had enough. For example, in both Nigeria and Liberia, it seemed quite respectable, the sum that we got, but there were other officers who were carrying quite a burden too. They did a lot of entertaining that was very, very useful, so Bert always divided the money with them. And so, sometimes we didn't have enough.

*Q: But, I really think in an instance like that, you probably were a little better off dividing and being a little out of pocket. I think you probably got greater production from the staff doing that. I would call that a good investment.*

MATHEWS: Oh, absolutely. I think, I don't remember, it wasn't all that costly. But once or twice a year, when there was an occasion for it, I would have a very large tea. I have shown you the pictures haven't I of all the women, there would be a hundred there, something like that. And I could point to each woman and she was a woman who was involved.

*Q: Are we talking about American women or women in that country?*

MATHEWS: No, no, no. I'm talking about African women. And we felt that that was important because they were powerful women.

*Q: Which gets back to the fact that the West African society really was matriarchal.*

MATHEWS: Well, the women were independent. Able to take care of themselves. Of course, their husbands could leave them high and dry, but they were jolly well not going to let that happen. They were going to be independent. They had all sorts of businesses of their own.

*Q: Absolutely, and these were our educated friends. Whereas even the very low income folk, people who almost lived out of the money economy, people who just made pennies, those were the market mammies. Those were the women who were making the money. And I'm not quite sure what the men were doing. Really, when you think of it. I'm talking about the lower, the uneducated classes. What were those men doing? They were out fishing. But the women were the merchants.*

MATHEWS: Well, I'm thinking of one of them, well, her husband was one of the biggest businessmen in Lagos, in West Africa. She had her own business too. She was not dependant on him. And that was true in most places.

*Q: That was true in Sierra Leone too. One woman raised roses. She found that she could raise roses in the shade in Freetown.*

MATHEWS: I found those women very interesting. I kept in touch with a lot of them for a long time. I wanted to. We send notes at Christmas now its been twenty years.

*Q: Now we've skipped ahead to Nigeria.*

MATHEWS: We got off on a tangent. We left Turkey. How did we do that.

*Q: We were talking about representation and you mentioned the large tea parties that you gave. In those days [inTurkey] there was no representation. You went from those tea parties to the ones in Nigeria where you said, in the photos, each woman that you could point out was involved in some way in the country, twenty years ago.*

MATHEWS: But going back to Turkey, I can't think of a typical day, because I seem to have done so many different things. It seemed that I spent an awful lot of time at home during the day, and people came there.

*Q: You had a bit less freedom there than you had in Afghanistan maybe?*

MATHEWS: Oh, yes. When I would say, I'm going to the Bazaar, or somewhere, Betty would call the driver for me. She would get up, put on her coat and come with me. She would say, "Mrs. Mathews doesn't really need me but we pretend that she does." We had

a lovely time together. She knew all of the merchants. She helped me buy that [rug] and the two in the dining room, you go back time after time, sit and drink coffee and talk. We had a very good time together. Another thing Betty and I would do when we'd break away, would be walk up the street to Tillas and drink Viennese coffee. Tillas was an institution oil Pera. I kept in touch with the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] which was very important because during that time when women were given freedom it was still very, very conservative. The only place that they would let young women go freely was the YWCA. There's an American director of the YWCA, a wonderful woman, sort of in the class with Betty Carp, Phoebe Clary. She had been there for years and it was a flourishing YWCA.

*Q: Now, what was she, Phoebe Clary, American?*

MATHEWS: American, oh, yes. These young Turkish women would be taught typing, sewing and all the things that young women learn in the YWCA. I used to go there quite often, it was very interesting. Phoebe was very highly thought of by the Turks, men and women. I can remember she visited us when we were at the UN in 1960 or '61. She had just retired. I took her into the UN. The Turkish ambassador saw her, got up, rushed across, and embraced her right before the whole UN. They really appreciated what she had done for Turkey.

*Q: Now how did she get to Istanbul, or did the YWCA send her?*

MATHEWS: Yes, years before when she was a young woman. Robert College was there up on the hill. Dr. Black was the president of the college and I got to know them and spent time up there on various occasions. It was interesting. There were lots of things going on. One of the fun things at the consulate, and very useful too, was a launch that was bought during the Grews time, called the "Hiawatha"

*Q: Hiawatha. Well, I didn't have the name of it. That's great.*

MATHEWS: It was useful. We would take our guests on a little run up to the Black Sea, and return. We'd have picnic on board. We could take six or eight. We didn't have a bridge then, so if we had to cross the Bosphorus to the other side to dinner at night, Naji, I remember the captain [would take us]. The last time I talked about it, Naji was still going strong. The Grews probably would remember that.

*Q: They did. As a matter of fact, Elizabeth Cabot mentioned the boat. Elsie said, oh, yes, that was the one that they used to go to Scutari.*

MATHEWS: The Kavases took various visitors on tours of the city.

*Q: What was that word again?*

MATHEWS: Kavas.

*Q: Like a guide?*

MATHEWS: No. That's just a name for the helpers in the consulate. They were called kavas then. I'm not sure of the proper spelling. There were a couple of them who would take visitors on tours of the city. Occasionally I would go along.

*Q: That seems like a pretty nice life.*

MATHEWS: Well, it was. But frustrating because there didn't seem to be that much time to do anything. Did you see the Turkish exhibition not too long ago?

*Q: Suleiman?*

MATHEWS: Yes. One of the places that we visited often was the Topkapi Museum.

*Q: I thought that was a magnificent exhibit, the detailed work.*

MATHEWS: Yes, it was. It's quite remarkable. Every time I'd go to the Topkapi Museum there were masses and masses of very precious, precious stones and things. It was overwhelming.

*Q: Many of them dating from Suleiman, if not most of them. That's what? Four hundred, five hundred years ago? I'd love to go to Istanbul.*

MATHEWS: It's a fascinating place. As I was saying, I'm sure the visitors aren't such a burden on the Consulate General now. Bert broke the ground for the Hilton cornerstone. But I there was a Park hotel and next door to the Consulate the Pera Palace which had been a very elegant hotel but was quite run down. No one wanted to stay there so everybody who could stayed with us. It takes a lot of time in spite of having such good help when you have a [continuous] houseful of guests.

*Q: I think you must have been a marvelous organizer. You had to be to accomplish all of that.*

MATHEWS: You have to pay attention.

*Q: Right, because the one thing people think is you're so fortunate to have a staff.*

MATHEWS: You know, I can remember one morning when a friend of mine was staying with us. I had been down in the kitchen and the cook and Elena (a ladies maid there and trained too) had been fighting. I got them settled down. There was a little room at the end of the ballroom. I had flung myself on the sofa and was lying back when my, friend came down and said, "Oh, Naomi, I've always said life has been very good to you; things are very easy for you." And I flared up and I said she didn't know what I had done. I don't

know why I didn't just keep quiet and say, oh, yes, yes. I said while you've been sleeping, I've done this and this and this and this and I feel ..... That happens to me.

*Q: But you see that has never adequately .... Maybe putting it on tapes like this and getting it in print will be the first time that anyone has really consciously thought about the role, well, it really isn't behind the scenes. My son is an executive and a very organized person and when he came down to visit us in Brazil, he took one look at the staff and said, Mom, you're really running an organization here with, we had six or eight people that I directed and was responsible for in one way or another. But I don't think our contemporaries who have stayed home appreciate the organizational, the administrative abilities that you develop throughout the years.*

MATHEWS: Occasionally someone comes along who does understand, and I've had several visitors who immediately identified and said, I know, I know what's going on. One was an Englishwoman. That woman knew what was going on because she was doing much the same thing. It made me feel so good to think, well, here's someone who doesn't think I'm just sitting back and letting flunkies pick up my handkerchief.

*Q: I wonder how many women who go out as the wife of a principal officer realize that an organizational job awaits them? It honestly don't remember getting anything from the Overseas Briefing Center. I was handed a book with this shaped glass and that shaped glass. I don't remember anything about the big organizational and administrative job ahead of you and here are some hints, the nuts and bolts of it.*

MATHEWS: Well, you know, Jewell, its different from post to post. It's an organizational job. In Turkey it was a real job. In Lagos it was real and in Liberia it was a real one. There were lots of people involved. Norway, not so much. Do you want to talk about Norway a little bit?

*Q: Yes, because we really don't have very much on Norway.*

MATHEWS: We had a very nice house there. It was a modern house. We had a driver and a cook and a maid. We had these three and they were quite good. Housing was short in Oslo at that time and so we were able to get very good people simply because we happened to have good housing for them. They had their own little apartments. The house went quite smoothly.

*Q: I wonder what its like to try to get someone to work for you in Norway today?*

MATHEWS: It's not easy, I wouldn't think. It wasn't easy for lots of people. There was a political ambassador there, Corrin Strong, a very nice man, who had close connections with Norway. His son, Henry, does a great deal for the Kennedy Center. He had a wonderful wife, Alice, who died a few years ago. She had connections with the art world. She really was the one who started the Art in Embassy program. She didn't know she was starting anything. She just wanted to bring some good paintings for the embassy



residence. She was a great friend of Duncan and Marjorie Phillips and they let her have a John Marin, I remember, and she had a Braque and there were several others. Really good art.

But Alice herself didn't think "I'm going to start this." It just happened. She was wonderful. And nice to work with because when I got there, she said, "I don't know what to do with these women. I don't know anything about diplomatic service. You do it." And so, I remember, I called the women together. There was exactly one, this was in 1954, there was exactly one woman whose husband had been in the Foreign Service for a number of years. The others were Wristonees. Such nice women, but they said, we don't know what to do, what are we supposed to be doing? I don't remember telling them anything special they had to do. We all liked each other, we met and they came to me with questions every now and then. I was in a position having been in the Service for a long time, they thought I knew what was proper procedure in many things and they trusted me. As Alice said, "They know I [Alice] don't know anything."

*Q: But, how nice that she had that attitude.*

MATHEWS: Yes. It was a very nice group. Well, some of them are here now. But there was the military. NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) was there, and there was a military group. The only thing that Alice insisted that I do, that I didn't want to do was sponsor a benefit for the Red Cross. The Americans had never done anything like that before, but that was the sort of thing you did in Washington and she thought it would be a wonderful thing to do here.

I didn't want to. But we did and surprised the Norwegians greatly. Some of them would say to me, why are you doing this? Why are you doing this for us? I don't remember, what I said, but we did it on the embassy residence grounds. It was a howling success, but it went against the grain, because I don't think you should move in and do things for people like that.

*Q: You've just described for me the post-World War II Foreign Service, when all these new people came in. Where we had people abroad who were not directly embassy, who were not Foreign Service Officers. That was an extension of the Marshall Plan, and there are a lot of people who don't realize that that attitude is a very recent one in the Foreign Service and was continued on in the Kennedy Administration, when, and perhaps you experienced this too, when wives were terribly pressured by Katie Loucheim to get the women doing things.*

MATHEWS: Oh, yes, Katie was. When I was in Nigeria and Liberia, I knew Katie pretty well. We were in touch all the time. She was pushing me to do things for them, I remember.

*Q: I'm fascinated because this is something no one has, to my knowledge, talked about yet. Before the war, in Sydney, in your early posts, Miss Bassell told you that you got a good report from Tom Wilson. But, that was in relation to your activities in the embassy,*

*not really in relation to your activities with the Australians. Suddenly, after the war you had people telling you how you should conduct yourself vis-a-vis the country that you were in and there was pressure that was put on you from outside that had nothing to do with your immediate relationship and your husband's.*

MATHEWS: It bothered me.

*Q: Is this going to change the attitude of our women toward the Service? Yes.*

MATHEWS: I didn't enjoy that experience at all. I felt that it was the wrong thing to do, that it was patronizing. I just thought, well, if they had said we need help here. Will you help us? But, no, we just went ahead and did it for them. That was the beginning of my tendency to dig in my heels and refuse to do anything like that. I think I've already said that when we got to Liberia, the women, some of the women were simply furious because they had to do all the work, the Liberian women had learned that if they pushed the American women a little bit they would work very hard and do all their work for them. That's when I decided that if I could help it, we would be cooperative, but we would not take charge. We would simply help them in a reasonable way, and that's what we did in Nigeria too. Except when we were asked, I've already gone into that, when someone would say, we need help badly here. And if I had someone who had expertise in that area, she then would go in and help them, with the understanding that they were not trying to take over the job, they were just lending the help where they were needed.

*Q: As with your literacy program?*

MATHEWS: Yes, the literacy program. There were all sorts of things. I heard from a woman just last week. There were lots of eye problems and they had a big organization for the blind.

*Q: Glaucoma?*

MATHEWS: Yes, and she was the one of us who kept in touch with them and worked with them all the time. We touched an awful lot of things. We simply helped where we were needed. They were in charge. We were not doing their work for them.

*Q: I would have thought that the Liberians would have been particularly sensitive about having American woman coming in.*

MATHEWS: Oh, no. They liked it. They wanted it. Oh yes, the more you could do for them the better.

*Q: Oh, I see, I'm sorry, I misinterpreted.*

MATHEWS: They would be there, but they wanted us to do the dog's work.

*Q: I see. The value of having a career woman at the helm, is that you knew this. And from your Oslo experience you didn't let your staff be drawn in. Very good.*

MATHEWS: That was the evolution of that.

*Q: And you took that on to Nigeria with you, or was it the other situation in Nigeria?*

MATHEWS: No, I'd began to feel pretty strongly about it after my experience in Oslo. I just thought that wasn't, that's not the way I would choose to help. And then Liberia. It worked pretty well there. We helped in a substantive way, but we didn't, we refused to do their work for them. Which is the way it should be. And then in Nigeria the same, only more so because there were a lot more projects, women's work, women's projects.

*Q: The more I hear about that, the more I wonder how much damage that attitude did toward the woman's willingness to take part.*

MATHEWS: Feeling that you had to. I'm afraid, during that period that I used to get directives from the Department, from Mr. Crockett. I would just read it and pay no attention to it because we were just so busy carrying on the way we thought was best.

*Q: I wonder where we could find some of those Crockett directives? They must be on file somewhere. I think that this is part of the interesting things that we are starting to piece together. I'm saying a lot of things that I know are over simplifications, but, I believe that the general attitude in the Service today, as far as anyone who has been there long enough to think about the '72 directive, was that the reason women resisted it was because they no longer had people to direct and push around. That's not true at all. What's more true is that they pulled away from us our reason for being there and they imposed new standards on us that had never been there before. Is that in writing anywhere? I don't think it is. This has been a very valuable session for us as far as pulling together our whole changing profile of the Foreign Service Spouse. It didn't just happen. There were social pressures, some from within the Service itself, some from society outside. And I don't think the State Department has fully moved with the times.*

*I'm sorry to say, no. How interesting, Naomi, And you saw all this entire spectrum, from the early 1930's to 1970. I think you have probably seen the greatest change.*

MATHEWS: I probably have.

*Q: I think so, because [if you] read Abigail Adams [you will find] not an awful lot of difference. One of the problems I ran into when I interviewed Abigail Adams seven times great-granddaughter, Casey Pelletier, was that she was telling me was just exactly what you read about Abigail Adams. So there are things that remain the same because there are certain givens in our mobile lifestyle. Very interesting. We're beginning to pull, a whole picture together here from 1915 to the present.*

MATHEWS: Well, I just rambled.

*Q: No, you haven't really rambled. Suddenly today you've added a new dimension to the whole project. We are pulling together all the bits and pieces of the changing spouse role because of the directive and things leading up to the Directive. And I believe what you're telling me is one of the things that led up to the directive. And we'll have to go and find some of Mr. Crockett's... They should be in the official record because they came out as airgrams.*

MATTHEWS: You know, I remember, I don't know if it was in Nigeria or Liberia, one communication came out saying that they didn't want wives of chiefs of missions absent from post for more than three months because it was noticeable that the morale began to be affected after that time. I remember being offended about that.

*Q: But what right did they have to...*

MATTHEWS: That's right. What right have they got to tell me because I...

*Q: How do you feel about this? We all complained to our husbands and with justification about various things. But when I would, perhaps, be rather vehement, Guido would say, look at this house you're living in. Look at this staff you have. Look at the access you have to the local community. Look upon that as your reward.*

MATHEWS: It's your reward alright, but its; not enough.

*Q: It's not enough. That's exactly the way I felt.*

MATHEWS: Certainly not. Oh, no. There were advantages, great advantages, but it wasn't enough. I always felt that I earned it. One thing, this is skipping but, I went to see Jack Matlock sworn in and he paid great tribute to Rebecca and said we shared this and we shared the paycheck. I forget how he said it, but he said it, very neatly that we shared the responsibilities and the paycheck. It was hers as much as his, that was the sense of it. I never felt that I didn't earn, that I was a deadbeat at any time.

*Q: After the Directive, I told my husband that I wasn't going to do anything that relied on anybody else, other than people you were in a position to delegate authority to at the mission. I said, Guido, I'm not going to ask anybody to do anything. I will do what I can do with my own resources. Well, he said okay, go ahead. That's what I carried on with me from post to post. Well, just do what you can, work with what you have and don't create any expectations which rely on other people's assistance because they may let you down. Now, I wonder how many women adapted that attitude.*

MATHEWS: I think quite a few.

*Q: I thought it was the only sensible one to take.*

MATHEWS: I have heard people say that.

*Q: You have heard people say that? That's something else that I thought should be in writing. I've never seen it in writing. I felt that the briefing about running a post, was inadequate at OBC (Overseas Briefing Center). I don't know what they do now. There were a lot of things that we knew -- which side to put the fork on, which glass to use for red and white wine. Perhaps I'm more interested in the administration. I would have liked more suggestions on how to work with your budget and fiscal officer. Marvelous budget and fiscal officer in Recife who said, well, you can't do that but you can do this. And I just got everything out of my ORE (Official Residence Expenses) thanks to that woman.*

MATHEWS: Yes, I think they should show the more practical side. This book "Social Usage" is a reference book. You can carry it around and use it when its pertinent. If you forget how to set your table you can look it up. If you forget how to seat your table, its there. It's a reference book -- you adapt it to wherever you are, to the situation. I found it very important how to work with the people in the embassy who were responsible for helping me. I worked out a schedule. There was always a nice young marine who was number two or three or four in the administrative section who would come once a week to see what needed to be done. We were having an important dinner party or reception so he would be there. If the lights would suddenly fail, he had to switch to the generator. And to be sure the water, the tanks, there was nothing wrong there.

*Q: You obviously knew how to build your staff morale.*

MATHEWS: Well, yes we always, Bert was, I don't know. He had a quality. You knew he wasn't terribly vocal. He didn't throw his weight around ever, but everybody knew he was there.

*Q: Of course Lucy Bergland has verified that too.*

MATHEWS: Yes, they knew he was there. I can remember, I can't remember whether it was a congressman or a senator, well, I admire my husband you know that, but he said, your husband is felt in every, every, I forget how he expressed it, but, everyone felt his presence there in the embassy.

*Q: Did he limit that to your husband or did he include you in that?*

MATHEWS: He included me.

*Q: I thought he did.*

MATHEWS: It was nice, kind of an after thought. I think that was true. He had that quality. He was always very fair and he stood up for his staff.

*Q: His officers.*

MATHEWS: Yes, and that is so important. Yes, he did. He has been known to have reached the point where he couldn't support a person.

*Q: But, that's the sign of a good officer too.*

MATHEWS: But they had every chance, every chance. He was good.

*Q: Because you're not doing anyone a favor, yourself or the person or the Service to carry someone along just because you don't have the courage to... Well, its interesting to think back over all this isn't it?*

*[Interruption in tape]*

MATHEWS: I've talked about Oslo haven't I?

*Q: Yes, that was very interesting.*

MATHEWS: You know I can remember, if I can go back. Is it okay to go back? I belonged to a reading group of Norwegian women and Americans. We'd meet once a week, read and discuss books. That was very nice because I got to know these women well. That was one of the bright spots. I really enjoyed that. They were terribly keen about art, particularly modern art and I remember we had a modern art collection on tour there which everybody liked very much. We went to that. I remember one Norwegian friend who was a great friend of Alice Strong's too. We would go regularly to visit the various art museums. I remember when we were going to leave, she helped me search for a painting by a Norwegian artist that evoked Norway and I have it downstairs over the chimney piece. Of course they're great outdoor people and I can't ski very well but I could tour. It's nice being able to stack your skis up outside the door.

*Q: You went there in '53?*

MATHEWS: No, that was '54. Because we were in England first. We were in London in '53. I'm sorry. We traveled. We'd go out on weekends. Beautiful, very beautiful.

*Q: Clean and wholesome.*

MATHEWS: Clean, oh, yes. I really enjoyed it there, but it was so different to be in such a peaceful atmosphere, where they liked us. You know in most posts you go out and you're not sure everybody is enamored with you. You're on guard most of the time.

*Q: In a way that takes a little of the excitement away, doesn't it?*

MATHEWS: Yes, yes it does. A little too, not really paradise because it was cold when

we got there, and things like that.

*Q: A little less stimulus maybe?*

MATHEWS: I'll tell you another reason. The wife of Olaf died so we were in mourning.

*Q: Oh, how long did that go on?*

MATHEWS: Oh, on and on. I remember wearing black. We couldn't except among ourselves. That's why these little things I've been telling you about were important to me, meeting with this reading group and skiing a little bit, going to museums. But the diplomatic circuit was rather quiet. We did have parties and he did go out, but they were very small and very quiet. I can't think of her name, not Astrid. Looking back, that's one reason it was a little quieter than it might have been normally. And we came home after that. That's when we bought this house.

*Q: Which was a very wise thing to do.*

MATHEWS: Yes, we had no idea how wise.

*Q: I think its very nice because, really, a number of you bought houses here at that time.*

MATHEWS: Yes, Peggy and Jake Beam bought their's just the same year. That's when I first met them. When Bert was transferred from Norway home, we were told he was to replace, take Jake Beam's slot on policy planning.

*Q: But that gives you all a nice little support system right here. Leila Wilson.*

MATHEWS: Yes, Leila and Hope Meyers. I've not known Hope that long, as long as that, I've known Hope a long time, but not like Leila and Peggy.

*Q: Frances Dixon said they bought their house sight unseen in 1948.*

MATHEWS: Did they?

*Q: Yes, I guess someone knew that she wanted the house and called her and told them, wherever they were at the time, I'd have to look it up. And they bought it.*

MATHEWS: It's a nice house. From someone she trusted, whose judgement she trusted.

*Q: I think it was a mirror image of a house, it was the mirror image of the house next door or something. I may not have this straight. But I do remember her saying that she bought it sight unseen.*

MATHEWS: A smart thing to do at the time. I'm very glad that we bought this.

*Q: I wonder if I mentioned to you another interesting thing that I've discovered in the year and a half that we've been interviewing. The demographics of the Foreign Service, the people who are maybe ten, fifteen years your senior, have a tendency to live around Sheridan Circle or on or near Woodland Drive. Many people in your age group live in Georgetown, the next age group live in Chevy Chase-Bethesda. Then its on out anywhere from Annandale to Springfield. Which tells you something about the increase in the cost of housing in relation to the increase in the, the real value of a Foreign Service salary. I actually had one of my interviewees tell me that, "I resent the fact that I spent thirty years in the Foreign Service and I thought that when I came back I would at least have a house in Chevy Chase. And here I am out in Annandale and my wife has to work." I didn't want to pry. I didn't think he should have had to live that way on a Foreign Service pension.*

*I believe that we're now scattered to the winds and that those of you who bought here in the fifties are the last real [FS neighborhood] group. There are young people who are beginning to move into Dupont Circle, but they're buying condos and they're not going to be there for thirty, forty years.*

MATHEWS: I know a young, well, they're not so young, he's forty-six now, who bought on Capitol Hill. They have a nice house. They've had it about six or seven years now. Their parents thought it was terrible, they didn't want them to live there.

*Q: I was just going to say, what street are they on? How far are...*

MATHEWS: It's in Southeast and I think its on Sixth Street. No. I am very glad that we got this when we did. I think it would be hell to suddenly be a widow and to have to reorganize your life altogether. Mostly people do.

*Q: One of the examples brought up at Guido's retirement course at the State Department was the widow who is out in the suburbs, because those houses are too large for one person. The widow is left alone in a home where three children or four children, the person in those days had a tendency to have more children, suddenly she's all alone in a four bedroom home in Bethesda or Chevy Chase.*

MATHEWS: She has to do something.

*Q: And suddenly she finds that she can't drive or its hard for her to drive or she doesn't want to drive. It's very hard to get someone like that to sell that house and move into a condominium in Dupont Circle. And she'd be so much better off if she would. But its very hard to get them to do that.*

MATHEWS: Oh, absolutely. It would be awfully hard to leave the home with all the memories. I tell myself that this is small enough that I can hang onto it for quite awhile. Some of my friends say, why don't you think of moving into an apartment? I couldn't. I think I can hang on here indefinitely.



*Q: I wouldn't dream of it. Because its just right. And convenient.*

MATHEWS: Yes, really I have quite a support system here, besides friends. The grocer, the druggist, the handyman.

*Q: Do they deliver still to you?*

MATHEWS: Oh, yes. Neam's has delivered ever since I've lived here. Ever since 1955.

*Q: And not having to rely on a car?*

MATHEWS: No, and you can get a cab very easily and buses very easily.

*Q: The whole picture of you as a Foreign Service wife becomes more complete every time that we talk.*

MATHEWS: Well, I talk. No, I'm not a talker really, but you're a good listener.

*Q: That's what I'm supposed to be.*

MATHEWS: I talk if people show an interest.

*Q: I would like to get back to the government officials and the generals that you sat next to at dinner night after night after night. In Afghanistan you said that the man, we always found ourselves next to the same people, when you said you were in Afghanistan you said, the person was a horseman and so you talked horses with him.*

MATHEWS: Yes, well, I did. I think I mentioned that because he came here as ambassador and was here during the time we were in the Department. He may have been the first ambassador here, Prince Naim, the brother of the King. And such a nice, sweet man and I always sat by him at dinner. His English wasn't very good and my French wasn't terribly good but that was the way we conversed. And we talked about horses most of the time. So I was very glad to see him here, and meet his wife, wonderful Princess Zohra. He was one that was eliminated about six or eight years ago.

*Q: That's what my little sentence there about the women coming from Afghanistan, I remember it now. You said that there were women who you didn't know in Afghanistan [only when they were posted in Washington].*

MATHEWS: Yes, I only met two Afghan women in Afghanistan.

*Q: And we do have that on tape, but it was the meeting of the other women, because they were here and had the freedom that they did not have in Afghanistan.*

MATHEWS: Princess Zohra is still alive.

*Q: What is her name?*

MATHEWS: Zohra. I think she was out of the country at the time. All of the men that we knew in the embassy were killed. Very sad. They didn't survive the troubles eight years ago. Too much of that. Looking back it seems that an awful lot of people have not... Well, I've talked about women practically everywhere haven't I?

*Q: Yes, but that's who you dealt with mostly.*

MATHEWS: Certainly in Afghanistan and in Managua and Norway, India.

*Q: India. We don't have any pictures of India.*

MATHEWS: We must have some. There aren't very many.

*Q: Should I jot that down?*

MATHEWS: Yes. India, Turkey, Oslo, those three.

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### BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Elbert George Mathews

Date entered Service: 10/35

Left Service: 12/31/72

Posts:

10/35 Vancouver, Canada  
4/37 Sydney, Australia  
9/40 Managua, Nicaragua  
12/43 Kabul, Afghanistan  
2/46 Calcutta, India  
7/51 Istanbul, Turkey  
12/52 London, England  
12/53 Oslo, Norway  
8/59 Monrovia, Liberia  
3/64 Lagos, Nigeria

Status: Widow of FSO (Ambassador)

Date and place of birth: Braymer, Missouri

Maiden Name: Meffert

Parents: H.B. Meffert and Letha Pool Meffert

Schools: Kidder Academy and Jr. College; University of Missouri; University of California, Berkeley; George Washington University, Washington, DC

Date and place of marriage: Oakland, California, 8/20/35

Positions held at post and in Washington, DC: President, AAFSW, 1970-72

*End of interview*