The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
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Foreign Service Spouse Series

SALLY "SALLY' B. CUTLER

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi
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INTERVIEW

Q: This is Jewell Fenzi on May 7, 1998. I am interviewing Sally Cutler for the AAFSW Oral History collection. We are recording this session at the Woman's National Democratic Club in Washington, DC. Sally, before we begin I would like to put on tape a coincidence that could only occur in the Foreign Service. Thirty-three years ago when we were in Freetown, your sister Jane and her then-husband John were at the British High Commission, and your father was the regional medical officer for Sierra Leone, and probably all of West Africa. If I remember, he was stationed in Lagos. Well, both Jane and your father played significant roles in our lives. We spent endless hours at the bridge table with Jane and John -- in West Africa I considered that mental health therapy! -- and your father took care of any physical ills, which fortunately were few and not serious. Then we met for the first time in 1997, and a few months ago we were chatting over lunch, and something you said made me suddenly realize that you were Jane's sister and that I had known your family many years ago in another time and another world. And now here we are embarking on a new friendship, but one with old ties for me. Let's start from the beginning, Cameroon, your first post.

CUTLER: Yes, we went to Yaounde in 1957.

Q: And you had just been married -- married in March and off to West Africa in June. You must have been in the first [Foreign Service] group to Yaounde.

CUTLER: Actually, I was the first of the first group to arrive in Yaounde. Walt and I sailed on the "United States" from New York to Le Havre, and then flew on a prop plane across the Sahara to what was then Leopoldville in the Belgian Congo, now Zaire. The trip across the Sahara seemed to last forever! It gave a real sense of distance traveled, which you don't get with jets. Leopoldville was the supervisory post for Yaounde, which was just being opened, and Walt stayed there for a couple of days to get briefed. So I went on ahead, alone, to Yaounde, where I was met by a little group of Presbyterian missionaries. They were amazed to see someone in stockings! Of course, in those days we always traveled in stockings and girdles and wore hats and gloves. Imagine!

An interesting footnote. Walt stayed in the consul general's residence while he was in Leopoldville. That was where he spent his very first night in Africa. Sixteen years later, he returned as ambassador to live in that same house. By chance, I had learned something about sub-Saharan Africa in a course I took my last year at Smith called "Africa South of the Sahara," which was taught by Professor Gwendolen Carter. She will appear again later. But I never guessed that less than a year later, I would find myself living there. Another coincidence, but Foreign Service life is filled with coincidences.

Actually, my journey to Africa began with my father's decision while I was a senior in

college to sell his medical practice in Wooster, Ohio, and join the Foreign Service as a medical officer. What got him started was John Gunther's Inside Africa. When he phoned me at Smith to announce his decision, I was so naive, or maybe so provincial, that I thought he was talking about the Foreign Legion and I said something like, "We'll talk about this when I get home." By the time I got home, he had sold his practice and was on his way to Washington with my mother and sister. I tagged along and took a job as a secretary in the State Department, thinking, I suppose, that I would move on to something more interesting later, marriage being my first choice.

One day, a friend of mine from Ohio walked into my office with Walt Cutler, and six months later we were married. By then, my sister and my parents were in Manila and they didn't come back for our wedding in Philadelphia, which I'd chosen because my parents had been married there in the same church. They and Walt didn't meet until we left the Cameroon in 1959. We joined them in Rome, where they were on their way to Karachi. We were on our way back to Washington. We got to Rome very early in the morning and went back to the pensione with my family. It was too early to find breakfast, so my father said, "Let's have a drink!" So right there, at dawn, we had scotch and warm tap water, and Walt must have thought we were a very dissolute bunch!

My father and mother spent sixteen years in the Foreign Service, much of it in Africa, which would figure so prominently in our own lives and that of my sister who served with her British diplomat husband in Nairobi and Freetown. We saw a lot of the missionaries in Yaounde, and I never much approved of what they were doing. It seemed to me that they didn't have a right to impose their own beliefs and practices on Africans who had their own ways of doing and thinking, and I still feel that way.

Some Africans went along with them for reasons having nothing to do with religion. One was that they made a connection between driving a Lincoln and being a Christian because all the missionaries came to Cameroon with big American cars given to them by their parishes in Indiana and Iowa. I think the Africans thought, well, if I go to this church, I will get a Lincoln! Of course, that’s not what happened, and I don’t think many lasting conversions were made.

But the missionaries were kind and generous. We had very little else in the way of an American community there. There was a man with Shell, who had an American wife, and there was an American couple with Mobil Oil. To the best of my recollection, those were the only other Americans in town besides the consulate group which consisted of Bob and Marjorie Foulon, Walt and me, and an administrative couple, Tom and Doris James.

Oh, yes, there was an animal trapper named Phil Carroll, who had been a battery salesman in St. Louis. He had a miserable little house out on the fringes of Yaounde, which was full of animals he was sending back to the States, either to zoos or for medical research. Now this was years before I became aware of this problem. He had a house full of baby gorillas. These are the lowland gorillas that are now an endangered species. He’d have as many as eight or ten of them at a time. Someone had knitted red sweaters for them. You’d go out there and here’d be these baby gorillas running around loose in the

house in little red, pullover sweaters. It was quite enchanting.

I remember one night going out with him, late at night, in the middle of the night, to pick up a baby elephant whose mother had been killed. Someone had told Phil Carroll about the baby elephant. It was an extraordinary experience because I never again, I think, drove all night through African villages. It's quite eerily quiet and dark.

Q: Dark.

CUTLER: There is not a light anywhere. We went on and on and on. We eventually found the elephant, put it in the truck, and brought it back. I do remember feeling that this is the darkest, quietest night I'd ever known. It was quite an experience. There was nothing much for me to do there.

Q: I was going to ask you ...

CUTLER: There was ...

Q: ... how did you fill your day?

CUTLER: ... nothing for me to do. Now, had I been an artist or a creative writer, or had some kind of hobby that one pursues in solitude, that I could have done. But unfortunately, I didn't have any of those talents. I read. I wrote many letters, lots of letters.

Q: Lots to write about.

CUTLER: I had lots to write about because my life was so unusual. But basically, I just kept house and traveled when I could with Walt. I also traveled with Dr. Gwendolen Carter from Smith, who came out on a Ford Foundation grant -- I think it was in '58 -- to study the political systems in the West African countries verging on independence. The person with whom she was traveling, who was her secretary and companion because she, Dr. Carter, was a polio victim, got sick in Douala. So Gwen Carter asked me whether I would go the rest of the way with her, and I had a fascinating two-month trip with her up the west coast of Africa, spending a great deal of time in Nigeria, all over Nigeria, and then going on to Ghana and Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia, and Senegal. Then I returned to Cameroon, and she went home.

It was a very interesting trip because her contacts were important. We were housed by the British High Commissioner [Sir Ralph Grey] in his palatial residence in Lagos for the time that we were there. All the chiefs in Kaduna and Kano and so on came out in full regalia to greet her. She met with the university professors. I went along as part of the party. So that was a wonderful opportunity for me to see and learn a little bit more of Africa.

One funny story about that trip. When we stayed at Government House in Lagos, we had

to dress for dinner every night. Well, I hadn't taken any evening clothes with me, so I had to buy something in Lagos, at a Kingsway store, I think. The pickings were slim, to say the least. I finally found a dress, but it was slightly small and strapless and I hadn't brought a strapless bra. So I had to wear it bra-less. After dinner we'd toast the Queen by raising a glass high with the right arm and shouting in unison, "To the Queen! God bless her!" Every time I raised my arm I could just imagine the zipper on that dress giving out and me standing there practically nude with my dress around my ankles!

It needs to be said that in those days, and still today, I think, relatively, Foreign Service officers were not very well paid. I think Walt was making forty-four, maybe forty-two hundred dollars a year when we joined the Foreign Service.

Q: That's right.

CUTLER: And while at that time it was certainly adequate to live on, we didn't have a lot of surplus cash to take wonderful trips in Africa. We couldn't just wing off to South Africa or over to Kenya or whatever, you know, for a holiday because the money wasn't there. That's too bad as I look back on it because we were there during interesting times, and I wish that we had been able to see more of the continent than we did.

Of course, the big thing was ordering food and liquor from Ostermann Peterson and Peter Justesen in Denmark. You'd make out vast orders, and then you'd wait weeks and weeks and then suddenly, the boat would come in and this stuff would arrive at your door, and it was like Christmas! There were all the things that you'd just been thinking about that you couldn't buy locally, like ketchup and peanut butter. Of course, I shopped locally. There were no supermarkets, and there was no PX. You had the same thing in Sierra Leone.

Q: It was just the market.

CUTLER: You went to the butcher for the meat, and you went to the vegetable market, and you went to the bakery and so forth and so on, and that took up part of the day. You played bridge. If I had my life to live over, I would come equipped with some sort of solo talent to see me through lean times. I guess at the time it didn't seem unbearable, but it was. The days were long.

Housekeeping took a lot of time and energy. We had a two-burner hot plate connected to a bottle of gas for cooking and a kerosene refrigerator, which probably very few people today have ever seen. There was no hot water in the kitchen, so if I needed hot water, I had to get it in the bathroom. I used to iron in our guest house. It had a large jasmine vine on the roof, which the African killer bees loved. One day when I was out there, the bees began attacking me. I guess the queen was doing her mating dance.

We had another incident with the bees. We woke up one morning and heard loud buzzing in the living room. Walt put some mosquito netting over his head and went out to see what was going on. Well, the house was filled with angry bees. Outdoors, where we'd been keeping some chickens for friends who had gone off on vacation, he found that the

bees had stung all the chickens to death. The gardener was so badly stung that we had to take him off to the hospital.

We regularly found snakes in the laundry basket and elsewhere. One even crawled across the floor of the living room one night when we were having dinner. You had to be very careful where you put your hands.

One day when we were expecting guests for dinner, I went into the bathroom, where there was hot water, to polish silver. I picked up a box of soap and behind it, coiled up, was a snake. So I put on my shoes and walked down to the road, where two African men were changing the tire on a Deux Chevaux. I politely asked if they would come and take care of the snake, and they did. Months later, Walt went to a reception given by the French High Commissioner, and one of the guests walked up to him and said, "I've been in your bathroom -- with your wife!" It turned out that he was the newly elected Minister of Youth and Sports, and I guess my snake was, in a way, a sporting event!

I had poor help and no cook. Our first houseboy was a Nigerian named Archibald. He was literate, and this was his undoing because he read Time magazine while I did his work. One morning he came to me with his hands behind his back, and he said, “I’d like to discuss the Syrian question with you, Mrs.” Well, I didn’t even know there was a Syrian question! I did know that while he was informing himself about Syria, I was out in the guest house ironing while the bees were attacking.

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: So I said to Walt that night, “For my birthday, I’m firing Archibald.”

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: I had never fired a servant in my life, and this was traumatic for me, but I did it. I was just worried to death. I guess I thought he might starve. Well, Archibald found another job in no time at all, and he was fine. His replacement was named Michel. He was somewhat more diligent about the housework, but he had an attitude. Finally. towards the end of our tour, I came home one morning from the market and nothing had been done in the house. It was as though he had not been there. So I said, “Michel, what have you been up to this morning?” And he said, in a surly tone of voice, “J'ai dormi, j'ai fais pee pee.” [I slept, I have make pee pee.]

Q: Oh!

CUTLER: And I said, “That’s it! You’re gone!” Well, he had a bicycle, and I had a Ford. I knew he was going to go straight to the consulate and appeal to Walt for redress, so we raced, he and I, to the consulate. I passed him on his bicycle, and I raced into to Walt’s office, and I said, “Walt, you have about three minutes to make a choice here.”

Q: [laughter] ... between me and Michel.

CUTLER: “It’s either me or Michel! Now, I know this is a hard choice to make,” I said, “but this is it!” I thought what would probably happen was that Michel would get in there and the two of them would agree that I was a difficult person to live with, but I’d get over it and not to worry. Well, Walt came down on my side, so Michel went. However, I had to hire him back because I couldn’t find anybody any better than he.

Q: Oh, no! [laughter]

CUTLER: So, of course, when he came back, he was worse.

Q: Worse than ever. Yes.

CUTLER: He went on to become houseboy to Marilyn and Allen Holmes.

Q: Oh.

CUTLER: We lent him one night for a dinner party at the consul’s house where all of the people who were anybody in Yaounde -- and believe me all of the people who were anybody in Yaounde weren’t much -- were invited for dinner. Michel was to handle the wine. Well, I couldn’t believe it. I looked around and here he was, dapper in his white jacket with pockets in it. In his left pocket, he had a bottle of red wine. In his right pocket, he had a bottle of white wine. [laughter]

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: He would sidle up to a guest at the table and sort of do a hip check and point at his pockets and say, “Vin rouge? Vin blanc?” Everyone in the room was looking at me as if to say, “Do you really suppose this is the way these Americans do things?”

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: If we had grapefruit halves for the first course and everyone was finished, he’d remove the grapefruit rinds, leaving the plates, stack them up nesting-style, and carry them in a leaning tower out to the kitchen. He never did these things when it was just the two of us, but there was something about a dinner party that stirred his creative impulse. He always did these things when we had guests.

While I was traveling with Gwen Carter, our two goldfish died. Worried, I guess, that Walt would think he'd eaten them, Michel put the two corpses in a glass of water and set it down in front of Walt at lunch! So he was quite a character. He stayed on with the Holmeses, and I know she has stories to tell about him, too.

I remember the airport in Yaounde. They had a little landing strip. It was a dirt landing strip. When the plane landed after dark, all the people in town would be asked to drive out to the airport and face their cars in a circle around the landing strip, leaving, of

course, one end open, or both ends, I guess, for the plane to fly into and out of. That's how they illuminated the airstrip at night, with the headlights from automobiles. This was extraordinarily primitive living for anybody like us, even in 1957.

We were there during the time when they were having real difficulties with a group called the UPC, which was a rebel group with some Communist backing that wanted to form the first government of Cameroon after independence. They began to commit some pretty heinous atrocities on Europeans, much like the Mau Mau in Kenya. One thing they did was they went into the movie theater in Douala one evening and macheted everybody in the back row. So the government ordered a curfew. No one could be out of the house after nine o'clock at night. If you were, they -- the Cameroonian police and so on -- had orders to shoot first and ask questions later, so people were pretty careful about going out at night.

One night about eleven o'clock, we were in bed. Now remember, this is a ground-floor house which was wide open to the world. No screens. No telephone. No house on any side of us. We had fields on either side of us, and no other houses in the back or the front that you could see. Our dog barked. She never barked at night. So Walt got up and went out and shook the sleeping sentinel awake. He slept well at night! He had a large spear to defend us with. The sentinel prowled around for a while and came back and said that there were two men going along the perimeter of our property next to our bedroom window. Well, Walt had said to me, shortly before that, that if the rebel group really wanted to get some attention around the world, a wonderful way to do it would be to murder somebody from the American consulate. So, of course, immediately those words came to my mind. We had no way of summoning help.

Q: Not even a radio?

CUTLER: Nothing.

Q: Nothing?

CUTLER: We had no radio. We had no telephone. We had nothing! Walt had a pistol, which he'd been told to keep -- and he's not a marksman -- with six bullets in it. So he went to the window and shot into the air three times, and we waited and waited. It seemed like forever. By now I am seeing the headlines in the New York Times. By now, it's all over. You know, "American Vice Consul and Wife Brutally Murdered in Yaounde, Cameroon." It would send everybody looking for their atlases! Then he fired again. All of a sudden, the police and the military and so forth arrived and nobody was found. But that was as close as I feel I ever came to being involved in some sort of really awful incident, though in Algeria we were there when Ben Bella was overthrown, and all that occurred right in our neighborhood.

Q: Were you living behind bars? Did you have security bars [in Cameroon]?

CUTLER: On the windows. But we had louvered wooden doors, double doors. Well, you

know, anybody can ...

Q: Walk right though them.

CUTLER: Oh, yes. There were no grills on them. Anybody could just yank on one of those and pull them right off. So we were really very insecure. But I think we were so young and weren't smart enough to know that it was a problem. At that age you don't think you're going to die anyhow. I did that night. I mean, I really did. I thought this ... this is it.

At last, our two years were up. I could not wait to leave. I was just at the end of my rope. I'd had it. We heard that Allen Holmes was going to replace us there, and then we heard that Allen wanted to get married and would we please stay on another three months so that he could have the wedding and the honeymoon and so on. Well, what can you say? Of course, yes, we said we would.

Finally, the day came when they arrived, and I remember them getting off the plane. I had met Allen at Princeton some years before that, so he was familiar to me. Marilyn, of course, I hadn't known. Allen got off the plane, and he tossed me his raincoat, and I almost fell to the ground. He had his pockets filled with every heavy thing that he owned, so that he could get it on the plane without having to weigh it in. I remember that. Marilyn, who would subsequently become and remains a close friend of mine, was just euphoric. She was a bride. She'd married the man of her dreams. She was going to do wonderful things in Yaounde, all sorts of fabulous projects. She had plans. She was just floating, and I was absolutely at my wits' end. I remember sitting in the living room, listening to all of this and sinking lower and lower in my chair and my eyes glazing over and thinking, "Oh, where does all of this come from?"

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: Of course, I didn't tell her that what lay ahead might not measure up to her expectations because there's no point in being negative at a time like that. So we had three or four pleasant enough days together, and we left.

I'd say about four months after we got back to Washington, I got a letter from Marilyn, and it started out sort of like this: "Dear Sally, Only twenty-two months, five days, seven hours, and nineteen minutes until our time is up. I can hardly wait!" And I thought, "Thank God! There's not something wrong with me!" You know, at least she now sees what I saw.

Our departure from Africa took us through Fort Lamy, in what was then Chad, which was the jumping-off point to Europe. We went into the airport, which was quite, in my memory, quite large. I'm sure it wasn't large, but it looked large to somebody who'd been two years in Yaounde. They had a dining room and bar behind glass doors, and we went in there and sat down. There were ventilation holes all around the edges of the ceilings, which is typical of African architecture. And there were ceiling fans.

I was looking at the ceiling and I noticed a bird flying up there. Walt, in the meantime, had stepped out to buy stamps because he was a stamp collector. When he came back again, I said, "Walt, look at that poor little bird flying around up there. It's going to come into contact with the ceiling fan, and that will be the end of the bird." Walt said, "That's not a bird. It's a bat. But don't worry. They have good radar systems. They won't collide with the fans." Well, he had no sooner said that than the room grew dark with bats. They swarmed in through those ventilation holes in droves to get the mosquitoes which were everywhere, and there were so many of them that their radar couldn't handle the fans and the next thing I knew, it was raining bats in that room!

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: Dead bats. Stunned bats. Comatose bats. Bleeding bats. screeching bats. The African waiters in the room were rushing around with little whisk brooms and dust pans, sweeping the bodies up as fast as they could. The woman behind the bar was pouring drinks as though nothing were going on. I literally thought I had died and gone to hell because I can face almost anything, but bats do me in! I had on a pair of stockings -- it was the last pair I owned in the world -- and we were on our way to Rome to meet my family. I slid under the table, got down on my hands and knees, and I literally crawled on all fours out of that room, which was big, and through the glass doors and into the other part of the airport where the bats weren't.

I think I had said something to Walt as we took off from Yaounde, something like, "Well, you know, this really hasn't been so bad. I suppose I wouldn't mind coming back to Africa some day." By the time we got on the plane to go to Rome, I said, "Walt, I take that back. That was a careless statement that I made, and, under these circumstances, I'm retracting it. I don't ever want to go back to Africa!"

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: Well, of course, I did go back to Africa. But it was certainly a fine farewell. Flying in Africa was always an adventure. I remember flying to Garoua one time, on my way to somewhere, in a great big Air France plane. Everybody on the plane got off and sat in the airport dining room where a French couple served lunch. You took whatever they had, and it was delicious. When we took off from the airport, the plane suddenly made a dramatic turn, came back over the restaurant, dipped one wing so close to the ground I thought we were going to touch the ground with the wing, and then flew away. I learned later that Air France pilots did that to say thank you if they'd liked the lunch. So with an airplane full of passengers, they did this aerial maneuver to say thank you to the French couple in the airport at Garoua. Well, that was, it was always sort of an adventure.

Africa was in ferment then. All these countries, one after the next, were becoming independent, and there was a lot of maneuvering about who was going to constitute the legitimate government and so on. It was an interesting time to be there.

When we left, there were no packers, so we had to pack up our few household effects and ship them back to the States where we were going next. Recently, when I was reading through Mette Beecroft's transcript and she talks about all of these people helping everybody with packing and making sure that they understand all these kinds of things, oh, I thought she ... You know, we just never had that. We never thought anything about it. I mean, you got the boxes and you filled them.

Q: Yes.

CUTLER: That was just the way you did it. If you didn't want to pack your things, you left them there. Otherwise, you packed them yourself.

I must say we've kept in touch with Bob Foulon [the first consul in Yaounde] since -- I still see him from time to time -- because in those small communities you become very close very fast to the people who are sharing that experience with you. Nobody else is ever going to understand. We've all had that experience.

We came home from Yaounde and went to visit Walt's family in Kennebunk, Maine. You get the question, "How was it?" And you only start to say how it was when suddenly you find you're talking about the local sewer commission or some piece of local business. It isn't that they're not interested. It's that it is so foreign to them, and I don't mean just geographically. The experience is so foreign that they have no way of relating to it, which, I think, is one reason that Foreign Service families tend to be so groupie because only someone who has been there, particularly in those earlier days, is going to know what you're talking about and understand what the experience was like. So you make close friends, and you see them often and keep up with them.

From there we came back to Washington, and Walt was assigned to night shift duty in the State Department where they read the incoming cable traffic and prepare a summary for the Secretary of State.

Q: The Operations Center.

CUTLER: After a while, when Rusk came in as Secretary of State with the Kennedy election, Walt went to work as one of the assistants in his office. He was working for Secretary Rusk during the Bay of Pigs invasion which, of course, I knew nothing about because Walt was very close-lipped. Someone once said, "Walt will tell you anything you can read in the New York Times."

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: Actually, that was my choice because I felt that not knowing was security for me. In other words, if I had known, then I might inadvertently have said something to someone in a situation where nothing should have been said. So I always said to him, "If this is something that needs to be kept secret, don't tell me." You just never know. Somebody could ...

We had three years in Washington then, and most of it he spent in Rusk's office. Then, towards the end of 1962, we knew we were about to go out again. At that time, they were tossing trucks full of boiling oil into the Casbah in Algiers, and I said to Walt, "Look, I'll go anywhere except Algeria. That's the last place I want to go." Well, guess what?

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: He came home one night, and he said, "We're going to Algiers." By this time, we'd had our first child. Allen was born in Washington. He was about … he was born in '61, so he was two. Walt went out ahead of me to Algiers, and I stayed two months with my mother and father who, by that time, were living in an apartment in Washington between assignments. I was with them during the Cuban missile crisis, so we left for Algiers on top of the Cuban missile crisis.

We got to Algiers in '62, and, as was the case at every post we had in the Foreign Service, we moved within post. The first place we stayed was not the last place we were in. We always moved within post. We eventually moved into a rather nice, quite modern house in an area called Park Paradou. At that time, Ben Bella was president.

One night not long after we got there and moved into Park Paradou we had a dinner party. We had some Turkish friends there that night. They stayed on after everyone left and we sat around talking about the coups d'état in Vietnam that were going on at that point. They went home and not long after there were huge bursts of gunfire all around us and tanks started rolling down the street and armored vehicles in front of our house. I remember Walt sent me into the hallway upstairs with Allen and told us to get down on our stomachs on the floor. He, of course, went to the window and opened it wide to see what was going on, which I thought was foolhardy, but he did it. It turned out that that was the time that Ben Bella was overthrown. The people they were after were members of his government who lived in Park Paradou. However, the Turkish couple lived next door to Ben Bella, so Walt called Dinch on the phone and said, "What's going on?" Of course, they couldn't speak freely, and Dinch said, "I don't know whether we have new neighbors or not."

After that, things closed down in Algiers. We were restricted in our travel. We were not allowed to go thirty kilometers outside of town without permission from the foreign ministry and so we kept pretty close to home in Algiers. We had to submit our guest lists to the Foreign Ministry for approval.

We had a funny experience when we moved into this house. Our phone didn't work, so I went down to the telephone company and said, "Our phone doesn't work." They said, "We know that. You haven't paid your bill." I said, "Well, we've never received a bill." And they said, "We know. We've never sent them out." I had nothing more to say.

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: Our phone didn't work because I hadn't paid the bill we'd never received because they'd never sent it. Those are the kinds of things that happen in the Foreign Service.

Q: Yes, yes.

CUTLER: They make it kind of fun. I want to go back because I'm looking at my own notes here. People talk about culture shock in the Foreign Service. I don't think I ever experienced it except once, when we came back from Cameroon. I'd never kept house until we went to Cameroon, so that is where I learned to buy meat and vegetables and bread and so on. We came back here, and I went to that Safeway on Wisconsin Avenue. I guess they call it the Social Safeway, or whatever. I was blown away. I went up to the meat counter, and there was this endless counter with cuts of meat I had never bought in my life, all wrapped in plastic. There was no human being anywhere to talk to. I remember thinking, really thinking to myself, we are going to starve to death because I don't know how to buy food here.

Q: So back in Washington with a baby and confronted with the meat market at the Social Safeway! [laughter]

CUTLER: That was my cultural shock. Now back to Algeria. I took a wonderful trip in Algeria. There was an NGO group out there -- a non-governmental ... whatever they're called.

Q: Organization.

CUTLER: An organization like CARE. I can't remember the name of the group now. It was small and not terribly well known. Three of them and I took a two-week trip through the Sahara Desert to see the Tassili cave paintings in the Hoggar Mountains. That was truly a breathtaking experience in every way. It was really a trek. We went with six donkeys and a Tuareg and a Sudanese guide and the four of us. We slept on the rock or the sand at night and walked during the day and saw these fabulous prehistoric paintings on the walls of the enormous rock pinnacles that rise out of the desert. I think people have an idea that desert is all sand. Well, there's not very much sand. There's a great deal of rock, which, over the millennia, has been hollowed out by the wind and the sand blowing against them, so that at the bases of these huge, skyscraping towers are hollowed-out areas large enough to stand in. That was where these paintings were. They were not in dark caves. You could see them. They really are remarkable.

It was our great good fortune to just, by chance, get the guide named Djebrin who had led the French expedition that went in in the thirties and rediscovered these paintings after centuries of their not being known to anybody but perhaps a few nomads in the desert. I remember at night the guides would make a fire on the sand, and then Djebrin would put his feet right in the fire to warm them. He'd been bitten by a scorpion or a viper on one of his trips, and he didn't have any sensation in the soles of his feet, so it didn't matter whether his feet were right on the edge of the fire or not. They were like leather anyway

because he walked barefoot.

The guides were, of course, Muslim, and at every appointed hour of prayer these two would throw themselves face down on the desert and pray. I remember we said to ourselves, "If you lived in this kind of an environment, you, too, would get down on your knees and pray," because it is impossible to describe the utter loneliness of that part of the world. It is empty. It is so quiet at night you could be deaf. There is no background noise of traffic or dogs barking or children crying or a radio playing. There is nothing. What you do get is a one hundred and eighty degrees of the most brilliant stars you have ever seen. There is nothing to interfere with the starlight. You lie at night on the desert and you look up and see this glorious sky. It is simply fabulous. It was the most wonderful trip.

We didn't have a bath for two weeks and we drank water out of goatskin bags, and out of the goatskin bags came goat hair and God knows what other sorts of things. We took all of our food with us. I remember Walt meeting me at the plane when we came back, and he said something about some kind of embassy thing that was going on, some little problem in the embassy. I looked at him and said, "You know, Walt, it seems so trivial." For quite a while after I got back, things did seem trivial to me. After the enormousness -- and I'm saying "enormousness" because "enormity" really is not the right word ... but it was an enormous world that I had been in, and all these petty human concerns just weren't important. I always said it was much better than a long course of psychiatric care. It was just fabulous. I loved that.

Q: Was Connie Hoffacker there with you? Connie and Lew Hoffacker?

CUTLER: I think they came after we did. No, maybe we did overlap, but I don't remember them.

Q: Because we were in Algiers on a trip in '67, right after ... Did you leave before the Six-Day War?

CUTLER: Yes. We left in '65.

Q: Oh, you left in '65, so when did you arrive there?

CUTLER: '62.

Q: Oh, '62. And Yaounde was ...

CUTLER: '57 to '59.

Q: Oh, yes, so you had gone before.

CUTLER: That's right. Bill Porter was the ambassador in Algiers, and John Root was the DCM. Mrs. Porter was quite a character. She had been an army nurse, and she still had

something of the WAC in her. Bill Porter was a big, easygoing guy who had been born, I think, in England. He had no formal education beyond secondary school.

Q: Was he career?

CUTLER: He started in the Foreign Service as a clerk and ended up being ambassador to Algeria and I think to ... I know he was somewhere in Asia, in Vietnam. He was ambassador to Seoul. He was ambassador to Canada. So here was a man, who, unlike most of the Foreign Service in those days, did not have an Ivy League background. He had really started from the bottom. He was a most affable and charming man. He was always very nice to me, and I think he kind of liked me. He wrote me one time, years later, when Walt had a promotion, and he said something very nice in the letter like "We both know that he would not have gotten there without you," which I thought was a nice thing to say.

Q: Very nice.

CUTLER: I'm sure that that's not the case, but I thought it was sweet of Porter to say this.

Mrs. Porter had a thing about hats. Here we are in a Muslim country where Muslim women cover themselves up with chadors, and Mrs. Porter insisted that all of her "girls" wear hats to every embassy function. Well, of course, I had not come to Algiers with a boatload of hats, and I really bristled at this; but, of course, we all managed to find something to put on our heads. Years later, when we went out to Korea to serve again with the Porters, I thought I was terribly smart. I knew something nobody else knew: hats were on the menu. So at some expense, I went down and I bought a selection on hats. I was going to be prepared. I got there and Mrs. Porter had gotten over her hat thing.

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: I never wore any of those hats the whole time we were in Korea. And, you know, I had spent money that we really didn't have to spend on headgear I didn't need, and I will never forget it.

Q: What year did you go to Seoul?

CUTLER: We went to Seoul in '67.

Q: '67 to '69?

CUTLER: '67 to '69.

Q: That was when the women's movement was underway.

CUTLER: Thomas, our second and only other child, was born while we were there.

Q: In Seoul?

CUTLER: In Algiers.

Q: Oh, in Algeria. Okay.

CUTLER: The circumstances of his birth were really unique.

By way of background, some months before his delivery the airplane at the embassy had overflown Algerian military installations in the Sahara Desert and the Algerians had impounded the plane. Ambassador Porter was desperate to get this plane out of hock. Also, Allen, who was a little over two, had been having repeated ear infections the way little kids frequently do. An American pediatrician had come through Algiers and had looked at Allen and said, “He needs to have a bilateral myringectomy” or whatever it is where they insert little tubes in the eardrums for drainage. This could not be done in Algiers.

At that time, all of the French medical people had left, and the hospitals were understaffed and under equipped, and it wouldn’t have been a safe place to have a baby. My father, who had been an obstetrician, was determined that I was not going to have a baby in Algiers, so I was to go to the military base, the American military base, in Torrejon, Spain. I would take Allen with me where he would get his ears taken care of and then I would stay on and have the baby there. That was the the plan.

Ambassador Porter seized this opportunity to say to the Algerian government that we had a medical emergency in the embassy. We have to evacuate this woman and her "sick" child. We need our plane back. Well, it worked. I don’t know why the Algerians were so gullible, but they let him have his plane back.

I had been told that Thomas was due in November, so the plan had been that I would fly up at the end of September with Allen who would have his ears taken care of. There was only one commercial flight a week. The next week Walt would come up, stay a week to get the next commercial flight back with Allen, and I would remain on alone in Torrejon to have the baby. It was the only way it could be done. Allen and I left about the thirtieth of September. I’m very pregnant, far more pregnant than I knew I was, and Allen is two years and three months old, and off we went. We flew up to Torrejon. I don’t know whether you were ever a patient at a military base.

Q: I was at Torrejon. At Torrejon. [laughter]

CUTLER: You are challenged to present your credentials -- in other words, what-in-the-world-are-you-doing-here? kind of thing. So I had loads of documents under my arms saying who I was and why I was there. When we arrived, we were put in the Torrejon "Hilton." Do you know that?

Q: You know, I can't remember.

CUTLER: Well, that is a misnomer. It was a three-story quonset hut, the guest house on the air base. They put us, Allen and me, on the third floor of this walk-up. So here I am vastly pregnant and with this toddler, going up and down the stairs. Allen was due to have his surgery on Wednesday morning, so that gave me two days to fill with him. We spent all the time riding around on a bus on the military base, looking at guns and tanks and all of the things little boys love. Tuesday afternoon, I put him in the pediatric ward to prepare for surgery the following morning.

While I was sitting there, I began to feel an ominous sensation reminiscent of labor, but I was determined that this couldn't happen. It just couldn't. It was totally impossible for this to happen. Here I had this little child who was going to have surgery the next morning in a place he'd never been and no father around. I just simply had to be there.

Well, my mother and father knew a couple named Copeland, who were with USIA in Madrid. Mother had contacted them prior to my going to Torrejon, telling them what was going on. They made the mistake of calling me that Tuesday afternoon and asking if I'd like to go to the officer's club with them for dinner. I said I would. So I left Allen in the hospital and went out to dinner with the Copelands, whom I had never seen in my life, nor they, me. This was in the bad old days when people drank and smoked during pregnancy because we weren't aware of the fact that this was a deadly thing to do. So I had a drink, maybe I had two drinks, but it was enough for me to say to them, you know, "I hate to bring this up, but I'm a little bit concerned. I think I could be in labor."

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: I wish I'd had a camera at that point so that I could have recorded their faces when I said that. I explained that Allen was being operated on the following morning, and if, in fact, what I thought was the case, I would need some help. They, of course, good Foreign Service people that they were, said, "Of course, we'll do whatever we can."

I went back that night to the "Hilton," in quotes. I climbed up to my room, and I took a sleeping pill. I thought, "I'm going to ward this thing off. This is not going to happen. I know I'm in labor, but it's just going to have to wait." My first thought was for my little two-year old. This shows you how damned ignorant we were in those days. I must say, none of this seemed to have had any aftereffects on Thomas.

About three in the morning, it became obvious that there was no holding this back. So I packed up my suitcase and trotted down to the desk. They had a Spaniard on the desk that night, and I don't speak Spanish, but I'm wearing a bathrobe, and I'm clearly pregnant, and I have my bag, which I left at the desk, saying I'd be back to get it in a few days; so the man at the desk got the idea that I was in labor, and he called an ambulance. Around comes the ambulance driven by an American kid who joined the Air Force to see the world and ended up driving pregnant ladies to the hospital in the middle of night. I hopped into the front seat with him and off we went.

Then, of course, I had to go through all of this paperwork when I got to the hospital. I'm in the full throes of labor at this point, and I'm pulling out passports and birth certificates and travel orders. Finally, they put me directly into a labor room with the Spanish bride of a GI whose first baby this was. She was wide-eyed with fear. Well, of course, that made it incumbent upon me to be the soul of calm reason, though we could not talk to each other. I remember I was reading E.B. White's essays and judiciously keeping very calm right though the labor pains. I think I read the same sentence in this essay thirty-three times. At about six in the morning, they wheeled me into the delivery room. I had no anesthetic. I had never seen the doctor who delivered the baby, whose name happened to be Castro. I remember looking at the clock on the wall in the delivery room and seeing it was 6:31 in the morning -- and there was Thomas.

At eight o'clock that same morning, my dear little two-year old was undergoing surgery, and there was no mother there. He was going to be anesthetized and and taken back afterwards to a place he'd never been before. I just thought, "This is the worst thing that could happen." They would not let me out of the maternity ward. I was quite ambulatory. I'd had no anesthesia. Peasants in China do this every day: you walk into the rice paddy, stop for a moment, throw the baby on your back, and off you go! They didn't let me go because they were afraid of the danger of infection traveling between the two wards. So what to do?

I called the Copelands and said, "The worst has happened, and here's the problem." Of course, they jumped into the breech, and the next day they took Allen home with them to Madrid. He'd never seen them before in his life. I remember looking out of the window at the hospital and watching this brave little boy, this little soldier, marching right along between these two complete strangers without any idea where his mother and his father were. There was no way that they could explain it to a two-year old that he could understand. Well, my heart just was broken.

Next, I sent a telegram to Algiers to advise Walt that Thomas had arrived. Well, Wednesday turned into Thursday and Thursday turned into Friday, and I heard nothing from Walt. On Friday morning, Dr. Castro came in and said, "You can go home now."

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: I said, "Well, I have a little problem. I don't have any home to go to." I gave him a brief explanation, and he said, "Well, all right, you can stay another night." Walt was supposed to come up that Saturday -- that had been arranged before we left -- and since I had heard nothing else, I assumed the plans were the same. So I stayed in the hospital another night and the next morning -- I'm still in my bathrobe because I didn't have any clothes with me -- I signed a promissory note in the hospital that I would come back and pick up my baby. Apparently, sometimes women leave hospitals and never come back for their babies. I then took a taxi back to the "Hilton," where I went up to the desk to collect my bag. Now it's about ten o'clock in the morning and the lobby is full of people. I said, "I'm here to pick up my suitcase." They said, "We don't know anything

about your suitcase." That was the last straw. I stood right there at the desk, and I cried. This time, there was an American behind the desk, and he said, "I think what you need to do is go to the hairdresser, and I will find your luggage."

So I walked into the hairdresser, still wearing the plastic wristband, still in my bathrobe. I felt that I needed to explain loudly enough so that everyone in there would understand why I was in this state. One of the other patrons was a nurse from the hospital, and she said, "I think there's some luggage, unclaimed luggage, in the patients' clothing room over at the hospital. Maybe it's yours." I got a taxi back, and indeed it was my luggage, so I changed my clothes and I picked up my baby, and I went back to the Torrejon "Hilton" again to wait for Walt. He did arrive as expected, and the Copelands took Allen out to the airport to meet him and drove him to our hotel. And it's funny -- I think it's funny. He walked in our room, and the first thing I remember him saying -- now, my memory may be faulty here -- was, "I would have brought you some candy, but do you know how expensive candy is in Algiers?"

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: There ensued a week of madness because now all four of us are staying at the Torrejon "Hilton." I have a brand new infant in diapers and a two-year old, I'm sorry to say, still in diapers. One or the other of them had developed a staph infection, so that as I went between the two, I had to wash my hands with Phisohex and change diapers and then go and wash my hands with Phisohex again. Walt would go down for dinner at night to the hotel restaurant with Allen. I would stay with Thomas. Then Walt would come back and stay with both the children and I would go down and eat alone.

One night when I was having dinner by myself, a rather nice-looking man came over and made me kind of an invitation. I just felt so good about that. I thought, "After all I've been through and I'm barely week out of the delivery room!" That was awfully good for my morale.

The bottom line is that ten days after Thomas was born and Allen's ears were done, we were back in Algeria. Now, whoever said the Foreign Service isn't glamorous? Whoever said that? That's glamour!

Q: [laughter] That is indeed!

CUTLER: But I must say I was enormously proud of myself for having managed the situation. What had happened with the telegram I had sent and the reason I got no response was that Walt had tripped over a fragment of it in the code room in the embassy on Friday. All that was left of it was "Walt Cutler, American Embassy Algiers, Love Sally."

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: The message was gone. Since he was coming up the next day anyway, I guess

he just figured, “Well, whatever it is can wait twenty-four hours.”

Q: [laughter] Oh, that is extraordinary!

CUTLER: One other little story connected to that. Walt had the foresight to know that if we ever needed birth certificates for Thomas, we’d better get all we needed right there and then from Torrejon because it wouldn’t be easy to get them by mail later. So he took himself down to the town offices and asked to have six birth certificates. These were all filled in by hand by the mayor, or whoever it was who was filling them out. Thomas’s name is Thomas Gerard Cutler. Well, the middle name the mayor wrote as “Gerald," and, of course, each one had to be corrected. The mayor put a little White-Out over each of the “l”s, and then he laid the six certificates on the balcony railing to dry, at which point a gust of wind came along, and all six birth certificates flew into the air and floated down the street in Torrejon with Walt and the mayor in hot pursuit. So even Thomas’s birth certificates had a strange beginning.

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: So that was a Foreign Service birthing experience. I don’t know how many others have had one like that, but I thought mine was different.

Q: Not many. Not many, I don’t think.

CUTLER: From there, we went directly to Tabriz, in northwestern Iran, ‘65 to ‘67. That was when the Shah was there. Not under the Khomeini regime.

Q: Another Muslim country.

CUTLER: Tabriz was a fascinating place. At the time we were there, there were any number of German archaeological teams excavating all around that area. One of the things we used to do was to pack up the kids and take off on the weekends, drive to the sites and spend the weekends camping and watching the excavations and finding out what they were getting. It was really an idyllic spot.

When we arrived -- the reason for that post, it was a listening post, really. We bordered southern Russia and Kurdistan. There was always trouble with the Kurds, so it was a listening post, a small post. Walt was the consul. We had a vice consul and a GSO whose wife was the secretary. For about the first year, we had a couple of Seabees who were overseeing the construction of the new consulate residence and chancery building, office building. The building had been designed by a famous American architect named Edward Larabee Barnes. He designed the Dallas Art Museum, and the Reagan Library, I think. Maybe it was the Nixon. I don’t remember. But anyway, he’s right up there with I. M. Pei, and whatever his name is? The fellow who did ...

Q: Stone?

CUTLER: Stone, who designed the buildings in New Delhi. Barnes had the idea that he would build these buildings to resemble Turkish baths because he wanted something that looked Iranian. So we had domes. When we first arrived there, the building was under construction, and the Seabees, of course, were there to make sure that they weren't planting listening devices as they were erecting the building.

The house that we first stayed in was the old consulate residence, and it was just charming. It was on a "kuché," an alley, with high walls. You came in the door and there was a sprawling, wonderful house that went on forever, with huge rooms and high ceilings and great, big windows looking out on to an enclosed courtyard. It was a little shabby. It was furnished with cast-off furniture from the embassy residence in Tehran, but it was elegant shabby. Wonderful old stuff, gorgeous Persian rugs. Huge fireplace. It was a divine place to live. It was great, except when the mud ceiling in the kitchen collapsed on the cook's head after a heavy rainfall. After that, he wore one of the boys' toy soldier helmets!

But eventually, the day came when we had to move into Edward Larabee Barnes's building. It was a disaster from a functional point of view, which has led me to believe that architects truly value form over function. The walls were probably a foot thick because there'd been a severe earthquake a couple of centuries earlier in Tabriz, so, of course, he was preparing for the next one. The windows were slits. They looked like the slits in medieval castles.

Q: For arrows. [laughter]

CUTLER: There was no way you could curtain the windows because if you put curtains on them, you had no light at all. The living room was domed, so some light also came from the ceiling, but it created a bizarre acoustical effect. If you had a dinner party and somebody was standing in the far righthand corner of the room whispering, it was clearly audible to the person standing in the opposite corner of the room, so, of course, it was lousy for diplomatic gatherings.

There was a kitchen with no drawers in it. There was no place for servants to sit down or change their clothes or take a rest or go to the bathroom. The only way that they could get from the kitchen to the family/sleeping area was to go through the living room. If I had a group of women there in the morning for a coffee, Mastura and Rubaba would come through with their buckets and pails and mops, wearing their head scarves, lumping through the living room, right through the guests and on to clean up the bedrooms!

It was a totally impractical house. The most impractical thing about it was that the guest room was just to the right of the front door, and at the far corner of the guest room was a bathroom. That was the only bathroom accessible to reception guests. So we had the unfortunate experience once of having the ambassador and his wife from Tehran for a weekend visit. We put on a large reception, and the only way that people who attended the reception could get to the bathroom was to go through the ambassador's bedroom to their bathroom. It was bizarre, just bizarre.

Being a polemicist at heart, I sat down and wrote Mr. Barnes a letter. I told him in no uncertain terms what I thought of his design! I reminded him that this was not just somebody's private house. It had a dual function, both private and public. It was located in a country where servants were essential and where there was a great deal of entertaining and you really didn't want a combined living/dining room, so that the people after dinner could watch the servants clearing the table. Of course, Walt, who was a much more cautious and diplomatic person than I, said, "You can't send it." So I didn't.

But I got to him indirectly years later in Jane Loeffler's book called The Architecture of Diplomacy, [Princeton Architectural Press,1998], where she detailed my complaints. I think the FBO [Foreign Buildings Office], which selects the designs of diplomatic residences abroad, should solicit input during the planning process from the wives who live and work in them. After all, who knows more about what works and what doesn't? The wives!

Aside from that, I think Tabriz was our happiest post. It was small. It was remote. Not that Yaounde wasn't small and remote, but by then we had a family, and it was a wonderful place for a family.

We had a donkey named Gloria, which the kids rode. I have a movie of my parents and us playing croquet and my Mother is pushing Gloria out of the way so she can hit her ball! Gloria occasionally walked right in the front door. We also had a small fox named Peter for a while, and we inherited an Irish setter named Tinker from our predecessors. Animals were a consistent theme in our Foreign Service life.

Allen was five, and it was time for him to begin school. I'd had him in a French garderie d'enfants in Algiers, but now it was time for real school.

Speaking of the nursery school in Algiers, I went to pick Allen up one day and found him with duct tape over his mouth! He was only three. The French teacher did that when children interrupted. I was furious!

Well, there was no school for Allen in Tabriz, so I had to teach him myself with the Calvert System. I'm not a trained teacher, but I ordered the materials, and every morning Allen and I would leave home and go over to the consulate building, where we had a little space which was our school room. I felt we needed to make the separation between home and school.

Q: Absolutely. Yes.

CUTLER: For the first few days it was slow going because Allen had to go to the bathroom every few minutes, and then he had to have a drink of water every other minute. When he got over that, we hummed away. To be honest, anybody who can read can teach Calvert. It's not a huge challenge because it's written out in such a way: "Ask (Student), 'How much are two and two?' If (Student) says, 'Four,' say, 'Good for you,

(Student)!' "

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: So that's how we spent our mornings. Allen has gone on to become a successful investment banker, having been graduated from Exeter and then from Amherst College, and I often remind him that he owes his success to his early education by his mother and that I hope he keeps that in mind because some day I'm going to ask for him to return the favor in one way or another.

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: And he will say something like, "I'm going to find the nicest nursing home money can buy."

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: But that was another experience that I think Foreign Service wives don't routinely have. I don't know whether you ever had to do any of that?

Q: No.

CUTLER: I'm glad I did. It was fun.

The French consul there was a bachelor who looked exactly like Mr. Peepers. He was kind of a touchy little fellow with rimless glasses and a pinched face. But there were two things about Pierre that I will always remember. One was, he and I shared a passion for caviar, and the most wonderful caviar in the world comes from that Caspian area.

Q: Yes! Yes!

CUTLER: It's called golden caviar and it is truly golden. He would go down to Tehran and return with a kilo -- a kilo! -- of golden caviar and come to our house. Walt didn't like caviar. Well, that was fine. Pierre and I would sit on opposite sides of a coffee table with this two pounds of caviar in front of us and everything you need to go with it, and we would just eat until we were nearly sick. I loved him for that.

The other thing was that every time he gave a dinner party, he ended it the same way. He would take a bottle of champagne and a long saber, and he would stand up and hold the bottle in his left hand, slightly canted forward, and he'd take the saber and massage this bottle right up the neck, right up to the cork, and it was very dramatic. He gave it everything. Then, all of a sudden, there was a fierce whack! He'd knock the whole neck off the bottle, clean as a whistle, and the champagne would bubble out! There was never a sliver of glass. It was as clean a cut as you've ever seen. He said this was a trick that he'd learned from the Foreign Legionnaires, and I suppose he probably did. But I always remember Pierre's dinner parties because of that little finale.

Q: That's quite a dramatic finish.

CUTLER: The only other dramatic finish I ever saw was once when we were in Rome visiting Allen and Marilyn Holmes some years later. She had the most elegant -- I think he was an Ethiopian -- houseman. He was wonderful looking. He was right out of "Othello!" After dinner, for dessert, he came out with a silver tray upon which sat this exquisite, woven, loosely woven, amber-colored basket, filled with a bombe, an ice cream bombe. I took a spoonful of the ice cream, and then he took the spoon from my hand and he rapped this basket so sharply that it broke! Well, I just sucked in my breath! I thought, "Oh, my goodness!" Of course, you're right: it was spun sugar. Those little effects are absolutely wonderful.

Q: Missing in our day-to-day lives.

CUTLER: Missing now. While we were in Tabriz, I took Farsi language training every day, and I liked it. I found that Farsi was a very easy language for me and, I think, probably for most Westerners because it's an Indo-European language. The sounds are not impossible to make and the sentence construction is very much like ours. I had a fair proficiency in Farsi by the time we left. I don't have it any more because I don't ever use it. My teacher was a Bahai woman, and I've often wondered since whatever became of her and her family when Khomeini took over.

This was not to be our last contact with Iran. In later years, we would have another contact, and I'll get to that in due course.

When the ambassador and his wife came to visit Tabriz the first time, when we were living in the old house, the day before they arrived, I went down with sandfly fever, which is just a terrible, painful thing. It's like dengue fever. You ache in every bone and joint. You run a high fever. You're practically delirious. The whole time they were there, I never saw them. I took to my bed with an IV drip. So that was one way of getting through a visit with the ambassador and his wife! But on the whole, despite the fact that we served in posts where health conditions were, to say the least, perilous, we were extremely fortunate. None of us ever had malaria. None of us ever had amoebic dysentery.

Q: Neither did we.

CUTLER: We did have some problems with worms and that kind of thing -- tapeworms and giardia -- but those are manageable. But I would say that we were all remarkably healthy for the entire time that we were in the Foreign Service when we were in these very remote and difficult places.

Q: And we were so young and really didn't think about it. Did you?

CUTLER: No, but, you know, I'd come home on leave and it took me a while to adjust to

the idea that I could brush my teeth, turn the tap water on, wet my toothbrush, and brush my teeth, and then fill a cup full of water from the tap and drink it because, of course, we boiled and filtered everything. You washed your lettuce in potassium permanganate. A great deal of my time in these places was spent supervising the kitchen help. You couldn't leave them unsupervised because, of course, they would take shortcuts. It's much quicker to put water in a bottle and stick it in the fridge than it is to boil and filter it. So you really had to constantly oversee this kind of thing. But we escaped without any serious problems of any kind.

We had one memorable adventure while we were in Tabriz. For reasons I no longer remember, we made a trip to Afghanistan, which we entered through the Khyber Pass from Peshawar in northwest Pakistan. We were accompanied by, or maybe we accompanied, a U.S. military colonel, who insisted on taking photographs in the pass despite numerous signs in English that banned the taking of photographs. Suddenly, a fierce-looking Pathan appeared out of nowhere with his eye fixed steadily on the colonel's camera. The colonel quickly tore the film from the camera before it was seized by the sentry. I thought, "Oh, my God, we're going to be imprisoned in some dreary guardhouse in the Khyber Pass and no one will ever know what happened us!" It was a tense few minutes before he allowed us to continue on.

From Tabriz we went directly to Seoul, again to serve with Ambassador Porter, at his request. There, we lived in a compound on Yongsan military base, and for that reason I think Korea is the least favorite of the posts that we had, for me, because the size of the American community in Korea was fifty thousand military and dependents and so on, a big embassy and a military mission, which made it nearly impossible to get to know and spend time with Koreans.

Q: I would think the language ...

CUTLER: Not only is the language difficult, but many of the Koreans spoke English. They'd had our military there for years. So the minute you tried to speak Korean, they would answer you in English. It would have taken me a lifetime to become as proficient in Korean as most of them were in English. So there wasn't much incentive to learn the language. You rarely got away from the American presence.

I remember a friend of ours there, who was a contractor with AID. He said he was going to write a paper on the PX as a way of life. You couldn't go ten kilometers without falling over a PX. And the compound was such that you could literally be born, married, live, die and be buried within the walls and never set foot outside of it. I found that very discouraging, so my memories of Korea are not ... I don't have a lot of wonderful or unhappy memories. There's not much that stands out for me in Korea.

We did go to Taechon beach and and rent a house that had once been a missionary's house. We'd take the kids and go to the beach, and it was beautiful. The Koreans are charming and interesting and energetic. We just didn't get to know them very well.

At that time I was working, volunteering, as the advertising manager for the American Women's Club publication. Another friend of mine, Martha Olmsted, and I did this together. We had a little ... I had a little Volkswagen. She had one, too. Walt and I had that Volkswagen from the day we left Yaounde until the day we left Korea, and it went everywhere with us. We, Martha and I, would drive downtown, and what Korean drivers did then was when they wanted to pass, they would roll down the driver's window and slap their arms on the sides of their cars and make this awful racket. Well, Martha and I would drive all over downtown Seoul doing the same thing!

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: And, of course, we did then have a chance to get in a little to Korean society. We talked with the Korean merchants to solicit advertising, and that was kind of fun. But opportunities were very limited.

I remember a farewell party that was given for us when we left. I had taken a whole bunch of evening clothes down to the thrift shop to sell, and to my delight, I went down a week or two later and they'd all been sold and I got a nice check, and I thought, "This is wonderful!" We arrived at our farewell party and all the women were wearing my clothes!

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: They'd all gone to the thrift shop and bought these things. [laughter] It was just a wonderful sight to walk in and there are these clothes that I'd thought were out of my life forever!

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: So we had good times. We knew a lot of awfully nice people in Korea, but, unfortunately, most of the ones we knew were Americans or Brits because that was who we saw. I also did a bit of volunteer work on the DMZ with the Red Cross. We'd go up and go through the hospital on the DMZ.

Then, in 1969, at the height of the war, Walt was assigned to the embassy in Vietnam. He was in the political section, of course, not in the military. The State Department gave me some options. They said I could go home to the States or I could go to Bangkok or to the Philippines where a lot of the dependent wives and families were waiting for their men who would get leave every three or six months or something and come visit. I'd heard enough about those living situations that I didn't think that was what I wanted to do. I didn't think I wanted to be in a community of a lot of wives who spent time at the clubs and swimming pools. I just didn't think it was going to be the environment that I wanted for myself and the boys. So I asked the State Department ... in a moment of inspiration, I said, "Look, I'd like to go live in Oxford, England." I couldn't really go back to the States. I'd been out of the States continuously since 1962. I'd been seven years out of the States. We didn't own a house in the States. My mother and father were living in Beirut,

and my sister, my only sibling, was living in England with her husband, who was a British diplomat. She had met him in Pakistan where she was with my family in the early sixties.

Here's a curious story. When we arrived in Zaire in the mid-seventies, I discovered that the Turkish ambassador, Bechet Tureman, had been best man in my sister's wedding in Pakistan fifteen years or so earlier!

In any case, there was nothing to bring me back to the States. I had an uncle who was a professor of medicine at Oxford. So I said I'd like to live in Oxford, and the State Department said okay, but you're to have nothing to do with the embassy in London. You are not to expect them to provide you with any services or support, and I said fine. That suited me to a tee.

Q: But you got all your housing. They took care of all of that?

CUTLER: Yes, the government paid for my housing. They would have paid for it in Manila or wherever. So off I went and I rented a wonderful house at the end of a lane called Jack Straw's Lane, right in Oxford. It was a great, big, old English country house that I rented for some ridiculously low price from a Spanish professor from Oxford who was on a long sabbatical. It came with an apple orchard and a gardener. I had a cleaning woman named Mrs. Pearson. I remember I paid her five shillings an hour.

The house was colder than cold, and I had every heating device known to man in that house. I had something called background heating. I had night storage heating. I had oil heating. I had fireplaces. I had electric heaters. With all of them going at once, you could never get the temperature up to sixty-five. I mean, it was a freezing cold house, but you adapt.

I remember sending the boys off to this dear little British private school called Greycoats. They'd go off with their little grey shorts and their little blue knee socks, and the skin between the top of the knee socks and the bottom of those pants would be the color of beets, and their little cheeks would be crimson. But it was wonderful for them. The school was marvelous, and they fit in and it worked wonderfully well. I just loved it there! Walt would come every six months for a visit, and he spent most of his time sitting in front of the fireplace wrapped in a quilt because he was coming from Vietnam.

Q: Right, right.

CUTLER: I'm sure he couldn't understand how we'd survived. I took some courses in architecture at the university as an auditor, and I really had just a fascinating time.

We did a lot of traveling. I think I've immunized the boys against museums forever! They were in and out of so many museums that I've never seen them show much enthusiasm since. I think they just had an overload. But it was a wonderful sort of normal life, and we were not involved in embassy social life. I found it terrific. I also think that it

contributed to the end of the marriage.

Q: And you're not the first person to say that.

CUTLER: If I decided that we were going to leave the house at eight o'clock in the morning, we left at eight o'clock in the morning. I planned where we were going to go. I chose the children's schools. I was involved in their school affairs. I paid the bills. Then, all of a sudden, back from Vietnam came my husband, who said to me one day when we got in an elevator, "I'm supposed to push the button."

Q: Oh, no. Oh, no, he didn't.

CUTLER: I was not prepared to be reduced to such helpless dependency that I couldn't push my own elevator button at that point in my life. Now I don't think he said that. He wasn't confrontational about it. It was some light-hearted comment like, "Well, you always get to the elevator button before I do," or something. No, I was used to getting the elevator button by then. But I do think it made a contribution.

Q: And a number of people have said that.

CUTLER: So I think there is an inherent danger in long separations in any marriage, and perhaps, in a way, even more so in the Foreign Service where, because of the places where you're living when you're separated, you need to be able to cope on your own a little bit more than you do if your separation is in Greenwich, Connecticut.

Q: Oh, absolutely. Yes.

CUTLER: So ...

Q: Although I have to say your separation in Oxford ...

CUTLER: It was hardly painful.

Q: ... sounds ideal for you.

CUTLER: Hardly painful.

Q: Yes.

CUTLER: Well, while we were there ...

Q: Walt was doing his tour in Vietnam.

CUTLER: I remember once he told me, "I'm coming through with [Ambassador] Bunker. We're coming through London and going to Washington for ... " You know, one of their official things. So I was thrilled. I was going to go down to London and meet

him. Because he was coming in at night, I rented a car with a driver. We were going to have a couple of days together. I arranged for the kids to stay with an American friend whose husband was a doctor studying endocrinology at Oxford. Then, I got a phone call, and he said, "We're in London. We're not going to stay over after all. We're going straight through." In effect, "Sorry about that." And off they went. I was just crushed. It didn't sound to me as though he really was that crushed. He was so focused on what he was doing that he didn't sense the depth of my disappointment or appreciate the preparations I had made.

Just prior to that time, Allen had had an emergency appendectomy, and I had rushed him down to the Radcliffe Infirmary at night, where he was operated on instantly when he went in the door and stayed a week afterwards. Of course, in those days, people stayed in the hospital. When the time came for me to pay, I said, "Where do I go to pay the bill?" They said, "You don't owe anything!"

Q: Which is remarkable!

CUTLER: Socialized medicine!

Q: Yes.

CUTLER: Here was this non-tax-paying American dependent who had a wonderful week in this hospital, absolutely perfect care, and it didn't cost anything. So I can go on and on and on about England. England was really a lovely time, but it wasn't Foreign Service. It was only tangentially Foreign Service.

During that time, I read an article in the Paris Herald Tribune that really raised my hackles. It was written by an American psychologist, who claimed that he based it on many interviews with Foreign Service children. He painted a bleak picture of the effects of the Foreign Service on Foreign Service children and the dangers inherent in living abroad and the threat that your child might be molested by pedophiles who were servants in your house and how these children missed out on all the wonderful things that American children are, in effect, entitled to enjoy in their lives and said something ridiculous like, "They learn to hate the United States and everything it stands for," and so on. Well, I just thought, "This is irresponsible!" So I sat down at my typewriter, and I banged out a long letter to the editor, and to my utter amazement, they published the whole thing as an op-ed piece. Now I can't find it. I don't know where it is.

But I said that I suspected that the Foreign Service children upon whom he had based this study were only those children who were having problems and had come to him for that reason, and that I couldn't see that he had used a control group of Foreign Service children who were *not* having problems to validate his study.

At that time, riots were underway in Berkeley and Columbia. So I said, "I'd be willing to bet you that there's no critical mass of those students who are Foreign Service children. I'm pretty sure it's not Foreign Service children who are fomenting riots in our colleges

and saying that the U.S. Government is no good and down with the Government and down with the President and 'Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids have you killed today?"'

My experience has been that Foreign Service children learn to love America and all it stands for because of their overseas experience, particularly kids, like yours and mine, who have spent a significant part of their childhoods in Third- and Fourth-World countries. They see the lack of freedom and opportunity that most of the rest of the world has, whereas you come back here and it's open-sesame. Everything's here. So I felt very pleased that at least I got that word out, and that is still my feeling.

I have always felt that children who have -- I know that this is not always true ... but I think a big contributor to Foreign Service children's problems is very often the mother's resentment of the demands and "deprivations" of the Foreign Service.

Q: You're absolutely right.

CUTLER: Her indirect way of expressing that resentment and getting back, if you will, at her husband who has put her in these circumstances, is to remind these children all the time, "Well, you can't be a Cub Scout," or "You don't have a room of your own to grow up in." I think that to the extent that the mother is content with what she's doing and finds it to be an adventure and communicates it as an adventure and brings her children into the romance -- and there is romance in the Foreign Service, whatever you say about it -- I think the children can come out of it pretty healthy. I'm sure that somebody will argue with me about that.

Q: I don't think so. My experience with that was in Rotterdam in 1958 when the Consul General arrived with his wife and two little boys, and the two little boys said, "We don't think we're going to like Rotterdam. We're going back into government housing."

CUTLER: You see, that's exactly it.

Q: That was mother one-hundred percent. My children didn't know if a house was government housing or privately rented.

CUTLER: No, this was just not an issue. Our children were growing up in a situation where they didn't know people who had their own rooms their whole lives. Everybody else was in the same boat.

Q: Right. No, I think you're absolutely right.

CUTLER: I'm a little bit ... I think sometimes we tend to ... well, of course, this is the society we live in now. Everybody's a victim. We made Foreign Service children "victims." I don't think they're victims. I think they're extremely lucky.

Q: Some are victims.

CUTLER: Some are.

Q: Like the manic depressives and ...

CUTLER: But manic depressives don't become manic depressive because of the Foreign Service.

Q: You don't think?

CUTLER: Oh, no, no.

Q: You think they're manic depressive before?

CUTLER: Manic depression is a chemical disorder. It is wired into the brain, into the genes, I think.

Q: But you don't think the Foreign Service exacerbates it? The Foreign Service experience surely must exacerbate it.

CUTLER: Well, I think if they're in the depressed stage of this bipolar disorder that probably certain things that happen in the Foreign Service can exacerbate it, but I think ... I am somewhat familiar with manic depression, not personally, but in my family. Clinical depression is another thing. It can be brought on by a variety of factors. But not manic depression.

Q: No, but I think you're right about the children. I think not only the mother's attitude, but the whole parental attitude towards the Foreign Service.

CUTLER: Exactly. You have to have the "Goody, goody, goody! Here we go again, this time to Freetown, Sierra Leone!" [laughter]

Q: Exactly. Exactly. [laughter]

CUTLER: Later on, when Walt was assigned to Zaire, Thomas, my younger son, who had never lived in the States until we returned in 19 ... I guess, he'd never lived there until we returned in 1972 from England. He was ten. No, no, he was eight. Then, three years later, we were going to go off to Zaire, and Thomas said, "Not me! I just love it here! I love McDonalds! I love hamburgers and ice cream," and so on. Allen, who's always been the other diplomat in the family ... I heard Allen say to Thomas, "We can fly first class." Well, Thomas just brightened right up! That did it for him because whenever we flew anywhere, Thomas was always peeking through the curtains into the first-class section and coming back to report that they have table cloths and linen napkins and flowers. Now, finally, because Walt was going to be an ambassador, we could get into the first-class section. That was all it took. Thomas was ready to go!

Anyway, we came back from England in ... I think it was '72. Walt went into the African

Bureau, as far as I remember. Not long after we came back, the ambassador in Cambodia asked Walt to come out as DCM to Phnom Penh, and Walt tentatively agreed. In fact, I don't think he was even tentative about it. I think he said yes, he'd do it. I had a real problem with that. He'd been in Vietnam for a little over two years, and now we were back in the States, and I felt that maybe he needed to stay home with the kids for a while. So I said to him, "I think you ought to talk this over with the kids."

Now you'll see why this matters in a minute. Walt is allergic to cats and dogs. Although we always had them, we lived in places where they were outdoors a lot of the time. So we had a little family sit-down, and Walt said to the boys, "Well, I'm going off to Cambodia and you can't go right now because there's a war going on over there, but as soon as it's over, as soon as things get better, you and Mother can come and join me." Ever the optimist, Walt! And Allen said nothing, which is typical of Allen. He processed that information. He probably felt the best thing to do was to say nothing. Thomas said, "Good, then we can get a cat!"

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: Then, the next thing Thomas said was "I don't want to go anywhere. I love it here! I love my school! I love my hamburgers and my Boy Scouts and my friends." And Walt said, "Thomas! Don't you want to see the world?" And Thomas said, "I've seen it!" Ten years old, and he'd seen it. I think Walt put all of that into his head and decided that maybe it wasn't such a good idea to go to Cambodia at that time. If he could in fact be replaced by a cat in Thomas's affections, maybe he needed to stay home. So he did.

We were in Washington from '72 to '75, and it was during that time that I went back to graduate school and got a master's degree in library science because it was something I wanted to do. The kids were then in school and I could arrange my classes so that I could be home when they were home.

In '75, Walt was asked to go out to Zaire as ambassador, back to the place where he'd spent his first night in Africa. So off we went and we hadn't been there very long when the librarian at the American school, which was called TASOK [The American school of Kinshasa], left, and they needed a replacement. I was freshly minted as a librarian, and it just was appetizing to me. So I said to Walt one night, you know, I really would like to take that job at TASOK. Walt's first reaction was, "You can't do that. You're the ambassador's wife. You can't do that." I said, "Well, why not?" So, he thought about it, and he said, "Well, I guess I can't really think of any good reason that you can't do it if you can still manage to do the entertaining." So I did. It was a paid job. I think when I took that job in '76, I may have been the first ambassador's wife in the American Foreign Service to actually hold a full-time, salaried job outside the embassy. This was not an embassy job. This was an independent school, international school.

I got a mixed reaction from the wives of the other ambassadors, the seventy-four ambassadors in town. The Swedish ambassador's wife, who lived across the street from me, was green with envy. She thought I was the luckiest person in the world. The Dutch

ambassador's wife, who was a frowzy, old Albanian, was outraged, *outraged,* that I would let down the side and not play my appropriate role as the wife of an ambassador and attend the luncheons and the tea parties.

One of the lovely things about being the wife of the American ambassador almost anywhere is that it really doesn't much matter what the other ambassadors' wives think. Your husband is, by virtue of the country he represents, the diplomatic VIP.

This reminds me of a wonderful story. It may be apocryphal, but I heard the story years and years ago. At the Foreign Service Institute, an ambassador came to speak to the wives. Do you know this story?

Q: No.

CUTLER: The wives were all there, and he said, "Now, I'm going to leave the room and give you five minutes to seat yourselves according to rank, and then I'll come back in." So he left, and a terrible fight took place! There was all sorts of juggling for position and so on. Eventually, they were all uneasily seated some way or other, and he came back in the room. He said, "Now, I have one thing to tell you. None of you has any rank. Your husbands have the rank. That's what I'm here to tell you today." I thought that was a lesson well learned.

There were some women I knew in the Foreign Service who never learned that and who didn't understand that you are not "Mrs. Ambassador." You are not Madame l'Ambassadrice. You are Mrs. Cutler or Mrs. Fenzi. Your husband has the rank, and that's the end of it. What I got out of by doing the library work was the endless, endless women's functions.

As you know, the newest wife in town has to call on all the other ambassadors' wives in order of precedence. Once I realized that this was my task, I set about it in a very systematic way. Week after week, every Wednesday morning and every Thursday morning, I would set out to pay my calls. Well, the last call I made was on the French ambassador's wife because they arrived just prior to our arrival which meant that they were the next to the last and so that's the last one you call on.

I'd just gotten back to the house and was breathing a huge sigh of relief that this was finally behind me when I got a telephone call from Walt's secretary, saying that the French ambassador's wife had just called to ask when she could make a return call. My heart sank into my shoes! I said, "Never!" The thought that I was going to have to go through this in reverse and spend the next several Thursday mornings and Wednesday mornings of my life doing this thing, I couldn't face it. So instead, I had a series of three or four morning coffees, and I invited a clutch of ambassadors' wives to each of these until I had them all back and that was the end of it. Now that did not go down well again with the Dutch ambassador's wife, but I really didn't care about her, so I ignored it.

When we were assigned to Zaire, I wanted to take my old, beaten-up, black Volkswagen

which we had bought secondhand after the first one that we had all the early years in the Foreign Service had been sold in Korea. It came with dents and scrapes and scratches, but I loved it. So before we left to go to Zaire, I said to Walt, “I want to take my car with me.” He said, “Well, there’ll be an official car for you to use, and I don’t think it would be appropriate for you to drive this Volkswagen in Kinshasa.” So I said, “Well, look, I really want this car." It was kind of reminiscent of my exchange with Michel back in Cameroon. Again, I gave Walt a choice: “I go with the car or I stay home with the car, but the car and I are staying together.” So the car went. I never used the official car except for paying those calls that I had to pay because I preferred to drive myself. It was my schedule, my time, and where I wanted to go, and I just didn’t like being driven around.

The DCM’s wife there also had the use of an embassy car, and she liked it fine. Most people did. There were many people, I think, in Kinshasa who right until the end thought that she was the ambassador’s wife because she went around in an official embassy car and I didn't.

One day I was driving down the street, the main street of Kinshasa, which is called the Le Trente Juin. The streets were going to hell in a handcart like every other piece of infrastructure in Zaire. The traffic lights didn’t work, so at the intersection they had a tall kiosk with two Zairian gendarmes on top, who were directing the traffic by hand. I drove up to this intersection, and it was time for my line of traffic to stop. They put their hands out, and I stopped and waited. Finally, they waved my line on. I was at the head of the line, and as I got right beneath the kiosk, they motioned me to stop, which I did. I rolled down the driver’s window and looked way up there -- they were way up there -- and the gendarme said to me, “Are you the wife of the American ambassador?” I said yes. A big smile crossed his face from one ear to the other, and he waved me on, and I knew exactly what had happened. While I was waiting there, he’d said to his friend, “You see that woman down there driving that black, beaten-up, old car? That's the American ambassador’s wife.” And his sidekick had said, “No way! Ambassadors’ wives don’t drive themselves around and certainly not in a car like that!” They probably had a bet and he won. So I made his day.

We had our own automobile repair service at the embassy. We had our own everything there. You had to have it. So I took the car in one day to get a grease job or something like that, and the head of the garage, who was a Zairian, said to me, “You know, Madame l’Ambassadrice, it's really embarrassing that you drive this car.” He thought this because so often their status is derivative of yours. And I said, “Well, you know something? If more of your government officials drove cars like this instead of Mercedes,” which were imported by the hundreds at God knows what price and ninety percent of them ended up wrapped around a tree somewhere, “there would be medicines in your hospitals and food in your markets, and your policemen and your soldiers would be paid instead of holding you guys up every time you have a payday because they’re not getting paid.” I said, “Think about it.” So I drove that car the whole time we were there.

While I was working at the American school -- and I would say that the population of

that school was probably sixty percent American and forty percent other -- I became concerned that these kids were really not getting any sense of what life was like for Zairians. It was about the time of the senior prom, and they were planning an elaborate dance with all of the ruffles and flourishes that proms have these days, trying to imitate what they would have if they were back in Bethesda or wherever. I proposed to the principal, and he agreed, that we take them on a field trip to Mama Yemo Hospital, the big hospital in Kinshasa. I'd been there before. So off we went for a field trip, and the kids were laughing and joking and having a wonderful time. Then we toured the hospital, and there were children there dying of starvation, and there were children there with kwashiorkor disease where their bellies become bloated and their hair turns red. There were people lying on the floors in the hallways, and if they were in beds, the beds had no mattresses. They were lying on bare springs. The families were there around them, cooking and taking care of the patients. They had three and four babies in an incubator, if they had an incubator. They had no medicines. I mean, people were ... It was dreadful. The change in the behavior and the aspect of those children from the time they started out on this trip and the time they returned to school was dramatic. I felt it was very important for them as they're planning this prom event to be reminded in a forceful way that it's not like this for most people.

I did a lot of that while I was there because I felt it was important. People tend not to want to look at things like that, just the way people even in this country don't like to go to nursing homes or deal with the dying because it's too painful. But that's life. So I had some effect on that school besides being rather tough on some of the teachers.

I remember one day picking up a paper on the floor in the library. The teachers at the time were all young. I think a lot of them, to be honest, were probably using drugs. It was that time. There was one English teacher, a man. He was an Amherst graduate. I picked up a paper that had been prepared for his class, and on the top of it was an "A-" and a note saying, "Good effort!" I read the paper and it was utterly illiterate! It was illiterate from a grammar, from a punctuation, from a spelling, from a content point of view. It was the work of a near-illiterate. Well, I marched into the principal's office with this paper, and I said, "Look at this! Now, for this kind of work, this child's being given an 'A!' That's unfair to that child. He's being led to believe that this kind of work is regarded in the real world as acceptable. He is going to be in for a rude awakening when he gets out in that real world and finds out that this is totally unacceptable." Needless to say, the English teacher was not happy with me. But I stood my ground. This was a time when schools were doing these things. They were working on building up everybody's self-esteem, and it really didn't matter whether you could read, write, and spell as long as you felt good about yourselves.

Q: Were your children in that school or were they older?

CUTLER: Allen was there for about a year, and Thomas was there for two years, and then they both went back to prep schools. There was no choice. If they had any hope, I felt, of going on to any sort of distinguished higher education, they really needed to come home, and we wanted them to come home.

Thomas and I would drive up to the school together every morning, but Thomas would insist on getting out of the car before we reached the gates because he didn't want to be seen with me, the ambassador's wife. I felt sorry for him. When he was driven into the residence compound on the school bus at the end of the day, the kids would all start singing "The Star Spangled Banner." This was terribly embarrassing to a middle-schooler who wanted to be just like everybody else. It's hard at that age to be singled out.

Some Foreign Service people sent their children to schools in Europe. I was opposed to that because I felt that part of the reason for coming back to school in the States was to develop a circle of American friends who would remain friends. I didn't want them to be alienated from their country, and so when the time came that we needed to send them away to school, there was never any question in my mind that they were going to school in the United States. That's home. They both did, and it worked out well.

We were in Zaire during the first outbreak of the Ebola virus, which now is a very famous event, medical event. A team came over from the Atlanta Center for Disease Control to investigate the problem and the head of the team walked into Walt's office and closed the door behind him, came up very close to Walt's desk, lowered his voice and said, "Mr. Ambassador, you've heard of the andromeda strain?" Walt said it was quite a moment. Some panic occurred in the embassy. I think there were two couples, maybe three, who actually left post.

Q: Were they given the option?

CUTLER: Well, I think you can't not let them go. I mean, if people really feel that their lives are threatened by something like this, you can't say, "Well, tough!" I think that was the right thing to do. But it also became incumbent on me and Walt to be calm about it and to create an atmosphere that would not feed fear in the embassy. But I do remember that it was a scary time because nobody knew what was causing it or how it was spread. All everybody knew was that if you got it, you were dead, and I do think that was scary.

Bill Close, father of the actress Glenn Close, was then private physician to Mobutu. He has since written a book on the outbreak of the Ebola virus, which many people have read. I have not.

That was one crisis we had there. Then, there were two invasions in the Shaba province. These things are always reported in the newspapers at home in a way that makes the people at home think this is occurring in your backyard, wherever you are. Well, Shaba province was a significant distance from Kinshasa, but, nevertheless, the country was at war. The French were flying in troops and the Americans were sending planes and supplies. So that was quite an exciting time to be there.

One of the things I did at the embassy residence, we had a wonderful swimming pool. We also built a tennis court while we were there. It was supposedly a helicopter pad and could serve as a helipad, but, in fact, it was a tennis court.

Q: And the swimming pool was a water cistern for the fire department? [laughter]

CUTLER: The swimming pool was already there, and I opened it up to everybody in the embassy and to all the Peace Corps volunteers, at will. There were some restrictions: no children could come without parents and no parents could leave the children unsupervised and that kind of thing. But I didn't feel there was any need for us to have a swimming pool to ourselves. The tennis court was used often and so was the swimming pool. The Peace Corps volunteers really appreciated it when they came in from the bush. It was wonderful to be able to come to that pool and sit there or swim. I think they enjoyed it.

We had a couple of Peace Corps volunteers who got sick when they were in the bush, and we would take them in to our house and they stayed with us until they were better or evacuated. I had a really sort of open policy when it came to the embassy residence. I did not think of it as my house. I felt that others should enjoy it, too. It was an interesting place right on the bank of the Congo, now Zaire, River looking across it at Brazza on the other side. So it was a nice place.

It was also a bit of a menagerie because by then we had a cat named Ralph and the monkey, Sweet Pea, and we had acquired three fighting cocks, which were gifts to Walt from some ambassador. We called the rooster Brewster, and he had two wives. He was as mean a bird as ever walked the face of the earth, and he was very territorial. He marked out the entire embassy compound, residence compound, as his private territory and, trust me, he attacked when you came onto that property. He flew into the air and flapped his wings and screeched at the top of his lungs and he came for you. I can remember when the kids were home visiting from school. They'd go out to the pool. Brewster would tear right along behind them, and they would use towels to flap-flap him away.

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: My monkey had been orphaned and was given to me by one of the children at the school. Then Walt brought home a pangolin, which is an African anteater, which we only had twenty-four hours because I raced up to the school and checked in Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia and discovered that you can't raise these animals in captivity because you can't provide them with enough ants and termites to keep them going. So that had to be taken back into the jungle in the middle of the night. I said to Walt after that ... he bought it in the market where he'd gone with Thomas looking for green pigeons. I said, "There's not a pangolin in Zaire today whose life's worth a nickel because the word is out that there's a man who will buy pangolins if you bring them to the market. The place is going to be flooded with pangolins!"

One day, I did have a ladies lunch, and I invited several ambassadors' wives -- the Swede, Saudi Arabian, the Turk, the Indian. There was one other. I can't remember who it was. We had lunch outdoors next to ... Oh, and the Belgian. She was a very fancy dame. Her husband had been chief of protocol in Belgium, and she wore impressive

jewelry at all hours of the day and night, the kind of jewelry that I normally wouldn't have, or if I did, I'd wear to a reception at the White House, but I wouldn't wear it with my street clothes in the morning. So she arrived bedecked in all her jewelry. I had Sweet Pea out there on a long tether. The Belgian had a monkey of her own. She loved monkeys. So she leaned down and said to Sweet Pea, "Oh, minou, minou," and Sweet Pea sank her teeth into Monique's wrist! Monique pulled away, and there was this bleeding wound in her arm, so, of course, we had to rush for the alcohol and bandages.

Prior to that, the Indian ambassador's wife had rolled up in her chauffeur-driven car, and I suddenly remembered that we hadn't corralled Brewster. So before she got out, I said, "Don't move!"

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: "Stay where you are!" Then all the servants and the gardeners and the gendarmes who guarded the residence and I raced around the garden, which was big, trying to trap Brewster, who thought this was great sport. He would dive into a bush and we'd surround the bush. We thought we had him and then he would fly straight up from the center of the bush, right over our heads and off to another. It took us about ten minutes to get him under control. Then the Belgian's bitten. Well, at that point, the Indian ambassador's wife, who'd been so terrified by Brewster, now sees that Sweet Pea has bitten the Belgian ambassador's wife, and she steps backwards so quickly that she came within a hair of falling into the swimming pool, sari and all.

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: Well, I want to tell you that I am sure that that lunch is still a topic of conversation in Zaire, and I bet they were all glad that I never did it again. So that was my ... Others have glamorous stories to tell about their receptions and entertaining.

We inherited a housekeeper, a sloppy, officious, African-born Greek named Madame Despina. She rode herd mercilessly over the rest of the staff, who roundly disliked her. She listened in on my telephone conversations. I'd say, "Hang up, Madame Despina," and there'd be a click on the line. She would plop herself out at the pool, knees spread, hair done up in fat pink curlers. A sight! When I found out that every Thursday afternoon she commandeered a car from the embassy to go to the market, I began to suspect that it was the black market! So I kept careful tabs on the inventory for a while and discovered that things like sugar and liquor were disappearing at a rapid clip. Well, by that time, I'd gotten over my fear about firing people. I gave her twenty-four hours to decamp. I don't know what happened to her after that, but things worked more smoothly in the house from then on.

While we were there, Kissinger came twice. I am sure that at some time in your life, you've been on the other end of either a presidential visit or a secretary's visit, so you know what it's like.

Q: Right.

CUTLER: Well, when Kissinger traveled, he traveled with a cast of thousands. He had two armored cars that leapfrogged down the coast of Africa, following him. The embassy, as you know, goes into a kind of spasm for a month or more before a visit like this. Nothing else can be done but preparations for the visit. Finally, the day came and Kissinger arrived. He was very charming. He made a particular point of stopping and taking time to talk to both the boys, and that was thrilling to them.

One of the evenings he was there, the Zairians gave a big performance of native dancing in the stadium. It was a spectacular performance. We were driven off to this event with a motorcycle police escort. Well, I was in the embassy, or in Kissinger's automobile, in the back seat. He was on my right and the Foreign Minister of Zaire was on my left. Walt was up front. We were hurtling through Kinshasa, taking corners on two wheels and the motorcycle police sirens were blaring. It was just a real chase. At one point, we went around a corner so fast that I literally ended up on Kissinger's lap, practically. I said, "Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Secretary. I'm not trying to sit on your lap." He turned to me with a little smile and said, "I'm not resisting" in his heavy German accent. So he was ...

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: I remember those visits as being just ... Everybody just went into full throttle.

Q: Yes.

CUTLER: We had others. The Secretary of Defense was out there, Don Rumsfeld, and any number of Senators and Congressmen. I remember Les Aspin came with his wife. He was such a gentleman, a charming man. Normally, these Senators and Congressmen, as you know, get a fistful of cash when they arrive, which they can spend on anything they want. I've always thought that was a dubious practice. He, at the end of his visit there, wrote a check to the embassy for every dollar he had spent.

The contrast was a fellow from New York -- a Congressman from New York stayed -- who, I think, is no longer in Congress, and I don't need to name him. Well, I can name him. It was Stephen Solarz.

Q: Oh, yes. Yes.

CUTLER: He stayed with us, of course. When it was time for him to leave, he turned around imperiously, looked at me and said, "Who's here to carry my bag?" Well, I had servants who were on their way. I wanted to say to him, "Mr. Solarz, who carries your bag when you leave home?" You know, this kind of thing annoyed me. That's probably why I'm not a good diplomat.

Q: No, but I hope he left a tip. The thing that used to annoy me was when they didn't tip.

CUTLER: They never left tips.

Q: Oh, it used to make me so mad because then you had to pay the tip.

CUTLER: Of course, we all know that they would come out on these visits and expect everything. They wanted the finest food, the finest wine, the most glorious entertainment. Then they would go back to Congress and say we were all living too well. Well, the fact of the matter is we didn't live like that unless they were visiting.

Q: Right.

CUTLER: Mostly, it ended up coming out of your own pocket because representational allowances were never adequate to cover those sorts of expenses. Everybody's had that problem, and everybody in the Foreign Service understands what that's like, so I'm not inventing here. I'm not telling you anything new.

Q: No, no, no, no.

CUTLER: When Thomas finally went off to boarding school, it was right at the time when planes everywhere were being hijacked. There was a real wave of hijacking. We sent our fifteen-year old off to fly alone from Zaire to Brazza, and from there to Brussels, and from Brussels to Boston. We had friends at the other end who were picking him up. We waved him goodbye and off he went.

I think it was probably twenty-four hours after he'd left, the middle of the night, we get a phone call. Our friends in Boston had called the State Department which is calling us to say, "Where's Thomas?" We thought Thomas was in Boston. Well, I was just ...

Q: Frantic?

CUTLER: ... frantic! All I could think was, "What a plum for a hijacker!" A fifteen-year-old boy with a diplomatic passport and a father who's an American ambassador. What a plum! Well, Walt, of course, was worried, but he couldn't do anything about it, so he went back to sleep. I stayed up all night long and worried.

Q: Oh, dear.

CUTLER: The next day or so, Thomas did turn up. His plane had broken down some place along the way, and instead of flying to Brussels, he'd had to fly to London. He had coped with all of this remarkably well. I mean, when I look back now and think what could have happened! Some man on the plane offered him a ride into London, to a hotel in London, and he took it. Today you say to your child, "If anybody offers you a ride, don't take it."

Q: Absolutely not.

CUTLER: Well, we didn't say that. The only thing he ever said about it -- and I just think this is so Foreign Service -- was, "I'll never fly Sabena again!"

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: Which, I think, says something about Foreign Service kids.

Q: I think I like Thomas. Yes. [laughter]

CUTLER: But those kinds of things happen to everybody, to everybody.

Of course, the two big highlights in Zaire are Mama Mobutu's funeral, which I may have to save for another day, and then the nomination of Walt as ambassador to Iran in the late spring of 1979. Almost all of us today know that the embassy was taken hostage in the fall of 1979. We were giving a very, very big dinner party outdoors that night that the call came.

Q: Here in Washington?

CUTLER: No, we were in Zaire. The call came through at noon from Washington. We were having lunch, Walt and I, outdoors. Things were going on in preparation for that night. He went in to take the call and came back and he was parchment color. He said to me, "They want me to go out as ambassador to Iran." And he said, I remember this vividly, "If they let the Shah back in the country for medical treatment, I'm dead!" That's exactly what he said.

Well, you know how these things are. When you're nominated, it's kept very quiet until agrément is received from the country to which you're going, and then there's the Senate hearing and all of this kind of thing. The announcement is not made until agrément has been reached. Then you have the Senate hearing. So for the next month we couldn't say anything to anybody. We had to go on as though life were normal.

About a month after this call, we were down in Matadi, which is the only seaport in Zaire, where there was a flour mill called the Medima mill. They imported American wheat and made it into flour, and the ten-thousandth bag, or something, of flour was coming out of the mill and the ambassador was asked to come down for a little ceremony to commemorate this event, so down we went. We were housed in a rusty, old freighter that was bobbing around in the harbor in Matadi. Then, over the Voice of America that night came the announcement that Walter Cutler had been named ambassador to Iran.

Q: Great.

CUTLER: So back we went to Kinshasa, and we made very short order of our departure and in no time at all -- I think it was a week -- we were out there. We said goodbye to everybody and we were gone. This was some time in May of '79. We came back to Washington.

At that time, I had begun to feel that it was time for Walt and me to take a break from each other, that maybe we needed time away. I was not happy, and I didn't think he was happy either. So this, in a way, was heaven sent because I couldn't go to Iran with him -- they weren't sending dependents -- and he was determined to go, and you can be sure that any FSO named ambassador to Iran at that time in history would have given his right leg to go out there, and I understand that. So that's when I said I was going to take up residence in Boston. Both kids were then in schools in Massachusetts. Allen was at Amherst, and Thomas was at Middlesex. And that's what we did.

So we came back, and I went to Boston and rented a little place in Bay Village, an apartment, and spent a horrible summer there trying to figure out what I should do and how I should do it and making lists and reasons to do it and reasons not to do it and crying a lot and it was an awful summer.

In the meantime, Walt was down here in Washington going through the Senate confirmation hearings. He was unanimously confirmed in a hurry and praised for his courage. Off went his personal effects to Tehran.

One Sunday afternoon, I was visiting a friend, an old friend from Korean days who lived now in Wellesley. My mother called me from Asheville, North Carolina. I guess she knew I was in Wellesley that afternoon. She said that my father's cousin, who was then in her eighties, had been listening to the radio and had heard a Reuters report that Khomeini had rejected the nominee for American ambassador to Tehran. So I immediately called the Boston radio station and asked if they had heard anything about this, and they said they didn't know anything about it. And I said, "Well, look at your Reuter's ticker." And he came back to the phone, and said, "It's just coming off the ticker right now."

So then I put in a call to Walt in Washington. He, for reasons I don't remember now, was out house-hunting. I guess we were going to sell our house in Virginia and buy one in town. I left a message, and he called me back, and I said, "Walt, what do you know about this?" He said, "I don't know a damned thing." And I said, "Well, why don't you call the State Department?" That's how he found out that this whole thing was unraveling.

What we think happened, and nobody knows, is that Jacob Javits, who was then a senator, had passed a resolution in the Senate condemning Khomeini for the execution of the Jewish leader in Tehran. That had infuriated Khomeini, who felt that this was inappropriate interference in his domestic affairs. But there's also some feeling that there were several people in this country, in academia, who had been very much involved with Khomeini when he was exiled in France and were very sympathetic -- they were anti-Shah, sympathetic with Khomeini -- and that one or both of these people had felt that when the time came, they were the appropriate nominees.

Later on, additional information from Khomeini was that Walt was too closely associated with anti-revolutionary regimes, having served in Vietnam during the war and in Korea and in Zaire with Mobutu. Of course, this is ridiculous. The ambassador represents the

country's policy. He doesn't represent or stand for the regime of the country to which he is assigned, but Khomeini had bought this argument. Well, the State Department's and the White House's reaction to this was, "You take Cutler or you don't get an ambassador." So, for the entire summer, this thing was in limbo.

Q: And you were in limbo.

CUTLER: I'm in limbo. The kids are in limbo. Allen describes that summer as the summer when we were Vietnamese boat people. They had no home anywhere. The boys were sort of floating, staying with friends, staying here and there because we had no ... We were nowhere. In the fall, the White House finally capitulated and sent Bruce Laingen out as chargé, and we all know what happened to Bruce Laingen. The rest is history.

The sorry part about that is that a number of people who'd served with Walt in other posts had volunteered to go out there with him, and they had arrived in time to be taken hostage.

Q: Oh, great.

CUTLER: So a number of the hostages were people we'd known in other posts. That made the hostage situation a lot closer than it might otherwise have been to us.

Getting Walt's things back from Tehran was a trick. They kept saying, "We won't turn them over to anybody but the amb ... but the diplomat, personally." And we kept saying, "But the diplomat personally is not coming because you won't let him." It was again a kind of an Algerian phone company story, but we did finally get his clothes and his squash racket and his photographs and so on back.

At that point then he was named, I guess, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, which was not his favorite post in the Foreign Service. I, of course, packed up in Boston and came back to Washington because this whole thing had fallen apart. Meanwhile, he'd dismissed the renters from our house in Alexandria during the time when interest rates were eighteen percent, and the house took forever to sell. We had bought a new house and we were paying high interest rates, and we still had a mortgage on the empty house in Virginia. It was a mess. So I came back and stayed in Washington with him for a year in the new house, and I went to work to help supplement our income. When the Alexandria house sold, I moved out. We were divorced in July of 1981. I left Washington shortly after that and went to Boston.

And then my next life began, and that's another chapter. But my story of the Foreign Service is not complete without an account of Mama Mobutu's funeral, and that may just have to wait until we get together another time because they're closing up here.

Q: Well, I think they close at five, don't they?

CUTLER: I don't know. It's up to you. Do you want me to tell a little bit about that?

Q: It's so good. Well, I'm going to watch this [tape recorder] because I realize what is happening is that when it gets to the end, instead of forwarding like it should, it rewound. So I think what we wiped out ... I think what it wiped out was the very first part about Cameroon.

CUTLER: We'll find out when I look at it. Anyway, "Mama" was the way Mobutu's wife was popularly known there. She was Mama. I think she died of exhaustion from repeated childbearing. I think she had eighteen pregnancies, and she was in her mid-thirties when she died. She died of a heart attack, and I can well understand it. He wasn't the nicest person to be involved with because he had lots of other women on the side.

After she died, the diplomatic corps was summoned to file around her coffin, which was lying in state in the parliament in Kinshasa. It was a boiling hot day on the Equator, and we stood in line forever. Finally, I got to the head of the coffin which had a glass over her face, and there she lay looking very peaceful, and I moved on. I suppose we all thought that she was next going to be buried, and that was that.

Well, a year later, we were all summoned again to fly up to Gbadolite, which was Mobutu's home village way up in northern Zaire near Chad, a wide place in the jungle, for the official burial of Mama. For this purpose, representatives from all foreign governments were invited. The French sent Madame Giscard d'Estaing and the Belgians sent Princess Paola, and the Carter administration sent two women who were on the staff of the White House. We weren't about to send Rosalynn Carter over for this. Emperor Bokassa, at that time self-proclaimed emperor of the Central African Empire, now reverted to Republic -- it's no longer an empire and he's gone -- came with his Romanian ballet dancer bride. She'd been part of a visiting troupe of Romanian ballet dancers who'd come out on a cultural visit to the Central African Empire, and he had taken a shine to her. The story was that the Romanian government presented her to him as a gift. Well, I'll tell you something, she didn't get any prize.

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: He was the one who beat school children to death because they wore the wrong school uniforms.

Q: Oh, that's right. That's right. He was crazy.

CUTLER: But he was there with his girl and so on. All of us diplomats, ambassadors, who had representatives, went up in advance on a plane, a huge plane that was loaded to the gunwales. We were just chugging through the air. People were practically standing in the plane. We landed on an unpaved air strip on laterite soil and the dust flew up in clouds. We were all pitched backwards in the plane by the suddenness of the stop, but we got there alive.

We got out of the plane, and a red Mercedes convertible came rushing up with Mobutu at the wheel. He spotted Walt and me, and he said, “Come, get in the car and I'll drive you to your lodgings.” We were about to get in the car when another plane landed with Ahidjo, president of Cameroon, whom we had known in the Cameroon way back in the fifties. He’d been president forever. Of course, he was a head of state and Mobutu had to greet him, and we ended up being driven in one of the fleet of Mercedes that had somehow been delivered clear up there. We were driven off to what looked to me like a motel, which had been built ... All of this had been built for this ceremony: guest houses, cathedral, an enormous residence for Mobutu with marble floors and everything you could imagine. The cathedral had been built by Italian masons of marble imported from Italy. He had created a shining city in the jungle!

We walked into our room, and I first took a look at the bathroom. We each were assigned a houseboy as we called them then. The tub had about three inches of heavily-sedimented still water in it. I turned to this fellow, and I said, in French, “Is there a problem with the water here?” And he said, “Oh, no, no,” -- typical African answer -- “Pas de problème.” You know, it’s always pas de problème. There was never a problem. Well, I knew enough to know that pas de problème was not a credible answer, so I said to Walt, “Give him every Zaire” -- that’s the name of their currency -- "you have and ask him to buy every bottle of bottled water he can find in this village. Right now, this minute!” I could have retired on the sale of that water if I’d been inclined to sell it, and lived high on the hog for the rest of my life because, in fact, there was no running water and there had been no running water for several days.

We went to lunch that day in a very grand restaurant with Baccarat crystal and Christoffle silverware and grapes and strawberries imported from South Africa and caviar and paté de fois gras from France, and it was ... And wines of the finest vintages and French waiters. I said to one of the waiters, “Is there a problem with the water here?” He said, “A problem? We haven’t had any water here for three days!” Well, we had water, not all that we needed, but more than most.

It was hotter than hell there, and, of course, mourning costume was expected, and people had to shave, flush the toilets, wash their faces, and take baths, and so on. I hate to think what they were doing with the dishes and the glasses and the silverware.

Q: That was my first thought. [laughter]

CUTLER: I didn’t even want to know. Of course, we didn’t know in those days that this was the country where AIDS is supposed to have originated, so, God knows, what we didn’t know was good for us.

Anyway, the first thing we had to do was go over to a little church, a chapel, again to pay our final respects. These were our *final* final respects to Mama Mobutu. This was televised for replay in Kinshasa on the single television channel which always opened its one or two programs a day with a screen filled with clouds. There’d be a tiny pinpoint in the cloud, which would grow and grow and there would be the shining face of President

Mobutu in his leopard-skin hat. That was the way all programs opened.

Anyway, this was being televised. Well, my friends who were watching back in Zaire claim that the expression on my face was one of amazement when I rounded the top of that coffin and there she lay, looking exactly the way she'd looked when I'd seen her a year before. And this is in the tropics! There was some condensation on the glass in that coffin, and I am convinced that she had been deep-frozen for a year and she was thawing as we watched.

(Interruption)

The next day a load of ambassadors who did not have representatives from home was flown up. They arrived at midday, just in time to fall in step behind the caisson that was transporting Mama to the cathedral where the ceremony was going to take place. It was boiling hot. The road was not paved. The caisson moved along at the rate of about a quarter of a mile an hour. Ambassadors and their wives were falling by the wayside from heat stroke.

Meanwhile, we're all seated in the cathedral where it was pretty hot, but at least we didn't have direct sun on our heads. The next thing I know, my friend, the Swedish ambassador's wife, comes alongside me. She's one who's just arrived and has made the walk, and she was a sight. Her hair was hanging in damp ringlets down the side of her face. Her eye make-up had run down her cheeks. She just looked exhausted. Under her breath she said to me, "*Some* of us had to walk!" Well, that hit my funny bone. So, of course, I am sitting there trying not to laugh during this somber event, and she, of course, thought it was funny, too.

Afterwards, when we finally got through the endless mass, with all sorts of monkey tails and incense being waved in the air, there was a buffet. Now you have been to diplomatic buffets, and I need not remind you that they are barely controlled chaos. You would think that diplomats attending a buffet had been fasting for a year.

Q: Some of them have. [laughter]

CUTLER: The struggle to get to that buffet table was simply unbelievable, and I just gave up. Not my friend, Ingrid, the Swedish Ambassador's wife. Next thing I know, she arrives at our table with plates up her arms like a short-order waitress at a diner, and they're loaded with food! She said, "This is a trick I learned in Warsaw. What you do is you just gently press the heel of your shoe -- in those days we wore heels -- into the toe of the person standing in front to you. And you say, 'Oh, excuse me,' and then you jump ahead. That person steps back, and you just move on in."

Q: [laughter]

CUTLER: "Before you know it, you're there." So that was her trick.

We had come up on the overloaded plane, and I think Walt felt that maybe it was better judgment for us to go back on the embassy plane, which he was entitled to use. So a summons was sent and the embassy plane came. I think it was an eight-seater or something like that. There was another opportunity I lost to retire in style. We could have sold seats on that plane for millions, among them one to -- what's his name? -- Tempelsman, Maurice Tempelsman, who was Jackie Kennedy's paramour at the end of her life, a great diamond merchant in Africa. He did, in fact, get on the plane with us. So we flew back on that plane and arrived safely at the other end.

Q: And he didn't give you a diamond?

CUTLER: He didn't give me a diamond. But it was really just the most bizarre experience I ever had in the Foreign Service, and I had a Foreign Service full of bizarre experiences. I've forgotten many of them, and it would take longer than you and I have for me to recount them, but that really took the cake.

Q: Wonderful.

CUTLER: I have a story about Mobutu. The background is this. Every day when I drove to TASOK I passed a caged lion. The lion was growing thinner and thinner as time went on. Probably the meat he was supposed to get was going home with the attendant, who needed it even more. So one day I paid a call on Mobutu's aide-de-camp, a Belgian officer, and made a plea on behalf of the lion. He probably thought I was nuts! Nothing came of it.

When we left, Mobutu invited us for a farewell dinner. I was seated at his right. He turned to me and said, "Ever since your husband arrived, he's been after me about human rights. And now you're carrying on about lion's rights!" He said it with a smile. He was a charming rogue.

As I look back, I have no regrets. I am delighted that we served in the posts that we served in. I am glad we didn't go to all the flesh-pots of Europe. I never would have lived in the places I lived in or spent any time or even visited the places that we lived in unless we'd been in the Foreign Service. I can go to London, Paris, Rome any day of the week, but to live in places like Kinshasa and Algiers and Tabriz was a wonderful experience. I am very grateful that I had it.

I feel totally divorced from the Foreign Service now, except for the friends we made, and I see them. But I am not involved in any way in the Foreign Service.

I never felt that Foreign Service wives should be paid -- and there I was obviously out of step -- because I felt that I did what I did as any wife in those days would do as part of ... That was my deal. He made a living, and I did the business entertaining, and that was the deal.

Q: And you would have done the same thing if you had been a corporate wife.

CUTLER: If he'd been with IBM or he'd been a lawyer or whatever, that's what, in those days, I would have done. Furthermore, I felt very strongly that if I give a dinner party because it is my part of the bargain, that is one thing. If you pay me to give that dinner party, I become a caterer. I'm not a caterer. I don't want to be paid to be a caterer. I don't want to be paid to be a hotelier. I'm not for hire.

I did feel, and I'm going to put this on the tape because I want it there for the record, that something equivalent to the GI Bill should have been offered to Foreign Service wives for two reasons: it was a way of acknowledging what you had done for no pay, and with marriages in the Foreign Service frequently ending badly or with education and careers disrupted, it would have been an opportunity for women to complete their education, polish up skills, or learn, new, marketable skills so that they could reenter the job market and be self-supporting. I never understood why that idea never, as far as I know, even had a hearing.

Q: I don't think so.

CUTLER: There may have been a problem because it might have been felt that if you extend this to Foreign Service wives, you'd have to extend it to military wives; but, after all, why shouldn't military wives who've served abroad be acknowledged and compensated in exactly the same way?

Q: Exactly.

CUTLER: We were performing, in effect, an unpaid service for the federal government. The fact that up until the seventies we were a part of the regular inspection process and our performance was evaluated as part of the husband's report says to me that, except for acknowledging us with any kind of compensation, we were considered part of the Foreign Service.

It could work like this. If you served X years abroad where you were not able or equipped to hold a job, develop job skills, or continue your education, then each of those years would translate into X number of credits towards education. That would have been not just for Foreign Service, but for any government wife, military or otherwise, who served abroad and performed the kinds of functions we performed. That would have been ideal.

Q: And I think if they had done that sooner, then they wouldn't have been faced with the necessity for the '72 Directive, which just cut us off, as far as some women were concerned.

CUTLER: That's right because by then the women's movement was in full stride and women justifiably were saying, "Wait just a minute here!" You've come out of this experience, if you are like me, divorced. You have no Social Security, no resume, no pension. Now they did change that.

Q: Yes, yes.

CUTLER: Now you're entitled to part of the pension, and, of course, that was too ... I didn't get that. I waived it.

Q: Oh, you waived it?

CUTLER: I waived it.

Q: Okay. Because I was going to say, you're entitled to it.

CUTLER: I waived it. I was entitled to it, but I waived it.

Q: Well, that was nice of you.

CUTLER: No, it wasn't. It was stupid.

Q: I thought you were being nice.

CUTLER: Well, I was being nice, but, you know, sometimes you can be nice and be stupid in the bargain.

Q: Oh, I can't imagine you making a decision like that, in that case. [laughter]

CUTLER: Well, I did. But, as I say, I wouldn't trade my Foreign Service life for anything. I think as far as my children are concerned, it was a wonderful experience.

Q: And they came out well.

CUTLER: They seem to have survived unscathed. Who knows? Maybe they'll spend the rest of their lives on psychiatrists' couches!

Q: Well, it seems to me exactly like another person I interviewed who had the same kind of positive experience said it was just her husband was a wonderful Foreign Service Officer, but the qualities that made him a marvelous Foreign Service Officer -- and he has gone on as Walt has to ambassadorships and assistant secretaries -- made him a terrible husband, not a terrible, terrible husband.

CUTLER: Well, I have to say Walt was not a terrible husband.

Q: He wasn't terrible. It's just that she felt there was nothing there between them.

CUTLER: Well, I felt that our relationship was more like two business partners.

Q: Oh, yes.

CUTLER: You know, it wasn't ...

Q: Well, I think maybe that's how she felt.

CUTLER: It was as though we were equals in business, but there was nothing more there. I think Walt was a superbly good Foreign Service Officer.

Q: Yes, I think he was.

CUTLER: I'm very proud of his achievements. When he had time for it, he was a wonderful, patient father. But his career was very important to him. That is not very different from an awful lot of men in many other professions.

Q: That's right. That's right.

CUTLER: Many of these men go on to marry a much younger woman after their first marriage, and you'll hear them say, "I have young children and now I have time to spend with them. I wish I could have done this ... "

Q: Before. Yes, yes, "if only I had had that time with with my first children!"

CUTLER: How often have you heard or read that? I'm not saying that he neglected his children. I think he was, is an important presence in their lives. But obviously, the fact that he went to Vietnam and that he was willing to go when called to Cambodia and all of these things ... The message is clear that, you know, "My career ... " Well, it was our way of life, too. So, in a way, he probably thought, with justification, this is how I make my living, and the better I am at it, the better living I make, so this is the trade-off.

He was lucky in a way to have me as a partner because I am a pretty self-sufficient person. I don't have a lot of self-pity. I coped. But I reached a point where I thought it's now or never. Either I've got to get out while there's still a chance for each of us to find happiness with someone else, or happiness alone, or it's going to be too late. I think he would agree that I did him a favor. I really do. He's married again, well. I think it's a happy marriage. She's an ideal wife for him. I like her. Walt and I are friendly. We don't see each other very much, but we don't ... It's not a cold war. It never was. I guess if it had to happen, it was as easily accomplished as anything like that can be, but never without terrible regrets for the fact of a divorce.

I'll never get over that. To have done that to my children, though they don't seem to harbor any resentment. I just feel you interrupt their history. You create awkwardness in their lives. I regret that very much. I wish I hadn't felt driven to do it, but I did.

My life since has been extraordinarily interesting and full. I had a brief and happy marriage the second time. My time as the director of a residential therapeutic program for troubled adolescents in Florida was a learning experience, in spades. I'd never had any contact with that kind of problem. So the opportunities that came to me after the Foreign

Service were rich and fulfilling.

So maybe, in a way, I've had the best of all lives. I had the period when I was growing up and going to boarding school and college and doing all the things that kids those days did. Then came the fascinating years in the Foreign Service when the Foreign Service was still fascinating -- and those outposts were still really outposts and you didn't have wraparound services and you didn't have a Family Liaison Office and you didn't have a CLO.

Q: And you didn't have the internet.

CUTLER: You didn't have the internet. Then from there to the world of work where I proved that I could support myself and do it well. Then a happy marriage cut short by Mike's premature death from brain cancer. And now my fifth life is unfolding.

Q: Fifth life, yes.

CUTLER: We'll see. So I have to say that I can't whine about the Foreign Service. I just can't whine. It did me a favor. Great!

Q: Shall I say, "End of Tape"?

CUTLER: Yes, say "end of tape."

Q: Okay.

***

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Walter Leon Cutler (divorced, 1981)

Spouse's Position: Career Minister, (ret.); President, Meridian International

Spouse Entered Service: 1956 Left Service: c. 1991
You Entered Service: 1957 Left Service: 1981

Status: Divorced spouse

Posts:

1957-59	Yaoundé, Cameroon
1959-62	Washington, DC
1962-65	Algiers, Algeria
1965-67	Tabriz, Iran
1967-69	Seoul, Korea
1969-71	Saigon, Vietnam (WLC) - Oxford, UK (Sally and children)

1971-75 Washington, DC
1975-79 Kinshasa, Zaire (Republic of Congo)
1979-81 Washington, DC

Place/Date of birth: Wooster, Ohio; 7 December 1934

Maiden Name: Beeson

Parents:
Harold G. Beeson, MD; Foreign Service 1957-c. 1975
Mary Leigh Beeson

Schools: Hathaway Brown School, Cleveland, Ohio; Smith College, BA, 1956; Catholic University, MLS, 1974

Profession: Librarian

Date/Place of Marriage: March 16, 1957; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Children:
Allen Bradley Cutler, 1961
Thomas Gerard Cutler, 1963

Honors: Phi Beta Kappa (Smith)

End of Interview