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

JOANNE GRADY

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi
Initial interview date: October 10, 1992

INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview was not edited by Mrs. Grady]

Q: Today is October 10, 1992. This is Jewell Fenzi and I'm interviewing Joanne Grady at her home as part of the spouses' program.

I rarely talk to someone as young as you; I usually start back in the 1940s or '50s. Reliving one's Foreign Service career refreshes memories and calls up thoughts one hasn't had for years. With you I think it's a question of spouse issues and you have an absolutely marvelous career. Why not start with Harvard, right?

GRADY: I got an M.A. in Human Development. I was the director of an international organization at the Kennedy Center. I worked for the Jean Kennedy family. I started in '81 and met my husband through the process of doing this program. I was setting up an international organization for them, and they sent me to about 48 countries to meet—well, when you go with the Kennedys (laughing), you meet the president or the queen or the pope or the minister of education. So I started at a high level in each country and would introduce the idea of arts programming for disabled people. That was the focus of what we were doing. I set up programs in about 56 countries.

Q: *Over how much time*?

GRADY: About four years. It was an incredible opportunity job. Also I met Jim through it. I was looking for money to do a program in China; he was the China analyst in the United States Information Agency (USIA) at the time. He gave me some money for grants; we started dating. I'd be telephoning him and he'd ask, "Is this business or pleasure?" Anyway I got the grant and somewhere along the line we got married.

In 1985 I took a group of artists to China to do a program with hundreds of "special education" teachers from all over China, something I had been doing in other countries. That was when my husband got into the Foreign Service. He had applied to enter prior to meeting me and didn't really tell me about that because he didn't know whether or not he'd be accepted. He, like me, had already been working for a very long time in sort of a higher-level career and decided to make a collateral move.

We were engaged and he called me and asked, "What would you think if I were to go into the

Foreign Service?" I had just flown into China; I'd been up for 36 hours. I said, "I can't talk about it now; wait till I get home." And he turned it down. I was running this program with Betty Bao Lord. I came home and he could see that I was very upset. So he reapplied; they offered him the option of going in again and he accepted.

Both of us went into this Foreign Service from a very rich experience. We'd been all over the world already, and we were both pretty far along in our careers as a result. When he went in he was 39 years old, so it wasn't like he was a 22 year-old guy. We went in with the assumption that we would see if it would work out for me and for him but particularly for me. I thought, well, I know people all over the world; what a perfect life for me. I can just go wherever I go with him and work because I have these programs that I actually started. I'll just work into them.

First we got sent to China. To tell you the truth, it was a huge shock for me, in every way, to be all of a sudden not considered a person in my own right, a director of an organization in my own right but all of a sudden a—spouse. I'd go to meetings— "oh, you're Jim's wife!" For me, who'd gotten married late, who had left my career because of this, it was a big deal when I first arrived to China, what happened. Which is why I went through this really existential thing: how do people make a meaningful life out of this? I was going around asking women, "How do YOU find meaning?" I took our Ambassador's wife to dinner and interviewed her for a couple of hours. She was an older woman; she thought there was a generational difference. But at any rate China, at first, and the whole idea of being Arthur's spouse hit me hard, because I was used to being my own person.

Q: *You couldn't plug into your former—*

GRADY: Well, I went to all the receptions that I could work with this organization that I had worked with before, even on a three-week basis but I'd been there. But in China, a Communist country, what foreigners can do and what the Chinese people do is quite separate. On my first day in China I got a bike and rode it to this organization—it was Deng Xiao-Ping's son's organization—and said, "I'm here! I'm ready to work!!" It was pretty clear that wasn't going to be the way.

The organization was called The China Disabled People's Federation. I'd known the son; I'd worked with the group. They came to the Kennedy Center as our guests as part of a big tour of the United States. There had been some exchange, so I thought it would be a shoo-in now. It was very hard. In China, things are not direct. All of sudden I realized nothing was going to happen, and I wasn't going to be able to go to the organization every day. It took everything I had, I had to seize the bull by the horns, to get control of what was happening to me and say, "Who am I? What can I do here? How can I do it?" and not sink into this depression that I saw everybody around me in. A lot of the American community around me when I first went there was so negative on China, about being there. I thought, "I'm not going to stay here three years and live like this and be angry about being here, unhappy because there's dust all over." These were all the things people were complaining of.

So I sort of made decisions. One was that I was going to get involved in China and not deal so much with the foreign or American community; that was the beginning decision. Two, that I would learn the language right away. I would have to structure it myself; no one was

going to show me how to do this; no one was going to offer me any work. So I kind of went back to them, the same organizations, and said, "Look: this is what I want to do: I want you to take me to all the disabled organizations in Beijing." I let them treat me like a foreign visitor, the way they're used to treating foreigners.

I let them take me to all the different schools for the deaf, schools for the blind, orphanages, centers for the disabled, their new hospital. At every one I visited I talked about what I had done and learned about what they were doing, and said, "I'm here and if you'd like me to get involved in some arts training, I'm willing to do some training." In the beginning I was doing this in English, but simultaneously I was taking lessons in Chinese. every day. What happened then was I went around doing training programs. I would go to the school for the deaf and do a big training program—show them how to use dance and music and drama and some visual arts with adaptations for disabled people. If the students are deaf or blind, or whatever, how you can adjust those and use them in education. When I began those classes I was using an interpreter—I mean, I didn't know how to say, "Make a circle," (both laughing) "Stand up straight," "Turn right"—all those things you take for granted when you're teaching.

It was really quite interesting, and it was very clear that all these groups wanted more. Especially some of the big places, like a big orphanage that had 400 abandoned disabled children. "Can you come every day?" At first I thought I could, but that was not going to make a dent in this place. So once more I thought, "Nobody's going to tell me that I can do this; I'm not going to get a job to do this. I didn't ask the embassy for permission because I probably would have been turned down, considering the political situation there. None of the spouses were working with the Chinese; everybody was working through diplomatic channels if they were embassy people, and this was private.

So I started an organization and called it Beijing International Volunteers. I advertised it all over Beijing and recruited other people—like you, anybody who was home or available, who had some Chinese language and who wanted to get involved with _____ basically. The first year I had 40 people sign up. I gave them a seven-week, day-long training with the 60 staff members of this big orphanage, doing it through an art form. And then they signed up for times and they went out—each group of volunteer partners would go and work—

Q: *You must have had some administrative costs. Did you bear those yourself?*

GRADY: I did; I didn't get paid by anyone. Even if I'd been paid in China it would have been useless; it wouldn't have amounted to anything. And that was OK. One thing about the Foreign Service, you have everything taken care of, so, in a sense, financially speaking, you weren't desperate for money at the time.

What happened because of that was interesting: all of a sudden I became a person in my own right. Everybody came to me with questions about education, and special education, and art in the American community and then the foreign community. It really worked; I didn't make it; it just sort of became an organization. And then Tiananmen Square arrived. I was very involved in Tiananmen Square, and my husband—we were always going to the square prior to the crackdown.

That was an awfully exciting time to be there. You'd be walking the streets with people and saying, "I cannot believe I'm here." I'm from the Vietnam generation, you know, the anti-Vietnam movement, and the students would be interviewing us. Jim and I went to the University of Wisconsin at Madison, which was a very active place during the Vietnam War. "What was it like in the United States? Is this what it was like? Are we doing it right?" And we would be in the square talking with lots of people. The night of the massacre we were both in the square. I left but Jim was there and basically saw everything and was the only American Embassy person to witness it.

Q: *Did the embassy discourage you from going to the square during the demonstration?*

GRADY: Yes, most people were discouraged from going. My husband was a Political Officer, covering human rights, so he was basically assigned to the square for certain hours but I was always with him when he was down there. In fact, we weren't unique in that regard. "Everybody" in China was in the square; millions of people were down there during those few days. The night of the massacre was pretty wild and Jim ended up becoming a very important witness because the Chinese government denied that anybody was killed. So we got involved in all that.

I was evacuated and left. On the way home, in Japan, "Good Morning America" grabbed me and another woman said, "Could you go on television right now?" We said we couldn't; we were catching a plane to San Francisco. So I was there on hold when I got on the plane, and when I got to San Francisco, Dan Rather was in the hall. People were there to capture me, saying "We'll put you up in a hotel overnight; you go on the air right now." I'd been up, like, five days straight, and I'd been on an amazing roll because everybody pitched in. I got on the hotline at the embassy to answer questions that everybody was calling in. Then we had a meeting and Ambassador Lilley said, "This is an optional evacuation, not required." Right in the middle of that meeting the embassy was sort of attacked; people were shooting all around, and immediately the ambassador said, "This is no longer optional; it's mandatory. Everyone who is not essential personnel has to get out of here. You have a half-hour to pack your bags."

My husband was in the square, so I didn't leave the embassy because I wanted to say goodbye to him. Meanwhile all the Americans were back at their houses getting their stuff together in this short time before going out to the hotel by the airport. The Chinese soldiers started attacking those houses and shooting bullets into them. I was, like, the only person left in the embassy. Somebody said, "Here's the phone list; you call every apartment and see if they're OK; tell them to get under their beds." So I was on the phone with these people—"Get under your bed; what's going on?" And they'd say, "The bullets are bouncing off the wall." Finally we sent a Marine van in to get the people out because they didn't know if it would get worse, whether they'd come in and try to round up people. It got very wild at that particular point. So I told people, "Grab whatever you have and run to the lobby. When you see the van, run for the van and get on." So by the time we got to the Lido Hotel people were in crazy condition; they didn't know what they had with them; they didn't know how they'd closed their house. Everyone stayed overnight there and calmed down a little.

I was involved in all of it. Then I was helping feeding on the evacuation plane and when I got to San Francisco I went right on the air. It was right after a national press conference with

Bush, who was talking about China. Then they came to me—somebody who'd just got out of the square and who'd seen what had happened. So it was really quite a thing. Somehow I hadn't seen because when you're in the middle of it you don't really see how bad it really is. CNN was on and I was looking. I had seen it really for the first time in the studio and I just burst out crying. Unbelievable. Luckily (she laughs) I didn't do that on the air. So that whole thing was wild.

I was home for three months while Jim was still there. Needless to say it stopped my activity. I went back in September three months later and the whole situation was different. China was a different place. I was not really willing to kind of stop everything, so I had to feel out where could I go without getting people in jeopardy. I went to the orphanage where I'd done all the work and they were not too happy having foreigners coming in, but they were willing to have me keep coming out there. I asked them if I could bring a few experts. I found, still, some volunteers who had real expertise in special ed—one woman who was actually a missionary there but they didn't know that. She was an English teacher and she taught a course in special ed curriculum; I had another person who did physical therapy. I never stopped the connection. And eventually things opened up.

We were there for two years after Tiananmen. It was a very tough time and everybody that we knew was somewhat afraid to see us and be with us. Yet they would eventually come around to calling back and we'd go see them. It was all very carefully done. For a while, and probably because my husband was covering human rights, we were marked: our car was left in Tiananmen Square the night of the massacre. Everybody knew our car; we were followed and were taped. Even some of the people that I would visit would say that the public security people had come after me and said we were dangerous elements and passing dangerous ideas. This was actually _____ but any rate, our friends, surprisingly a lot of people we knew, kept contact even though it was risky for them. I kept this orphanage limping along for the first year I was back.

The second year it opened up more and more and I got into more activity. I started doing fund-raising so that we could do corrective surgery for a lot of the kids who had very minor problems—I mean, things that here would be corrected, like cleft palates; normal kids would like this or something. So I raised a little money and brought it down and we did a toy drive. We had lots of activity the third year, and by the end the project was sort of back in action and a lot of people wanted to take it when I left and keep it going.

Q: *I was just going to ask you what happened to it when you left.*

GRADY: Well, I heard—the Canadian Ambassador's wife actually got very involved and she kind of took on the role that I'd had. Then I heard that when Secretary of State James Baker was there, he went to that orphanage—his wife or he or both of them, I'm not sure—which caused a lot of attention. Then they had to slow it down again, _____ to go there. I don't know where it is now. I'd love to know. I "sent" two women who just went to China where to go and do this and this and let me know.

Q: *So the orphanage was the one that your volunteer pin resulted from, right?*

GRADY: I think so. Although I did a lot of other things I really do think that was the main

reason. I got a lot of coverage in the press. I was in People's _____ and the China Daily and was on television. You know, people first of all could not understand why a foreigner would want to get involved with disabled people in China.

Q: *I was just going to ask you earlier if the family had a disabled child, did they just want to get rid of it?*

GRADY: Yes. It's a shame. First of all, the superstition, a feeling that their ancestry had done something evil or bad and they were being punished for that. But the sign of it—

Q: *—as families*

GRADY: Oh yes. And they're only allowed to have one child, so they don't want to have a child that's disabled. They don't even want to have a girl; in that particular orphanage there were 75 babies in the baby room and there were several girls that had nothing wrong with them–—

Q: *If you had a disabled child and turned it over to the orphanage could you have another one?*

GRADY: Well, they were all abandoned; nobody knew. They were found at bus stops and it was an embarrassment not only to the government that this existed. It was loss of face for the Chinese people that they couldn't take care of their own children. There were all kinds of levels at which it was difficult. For instance, several adoption agencies found out about me and wrote to me asking if I would be their adoption agent. The Chinese government refused to allow that _____ changing again _____. I actually helped a couple of people in China adopt a couple of kids out of there but that's all very personal—guanchi (phonetic spelling) as they call it and _____ they want to do carefully orchestrated.

But at any rate that whole project got me involved in China in a way that I don't think other people would have gotten involved. After Tiananmen people like the ambassador were coming to me to find out what was going on because nobody could talk to any Chinese people and I was still sort of going about the community. Also _____ (name of Chinese figure) became a major figure in the whole movement and a lot of the demonstrations were against him _____ very political organization. In fact the main organization where I'd originally gone and which took me around, they couldn't have anything to do with me. Again they never said "we can't have anything to do with you;" it was just somehow I could feel I wasn't invited there any more. I taught English there every week during the first year and I was very friendly with them even though I couldn't work in the office. I had them to my house and everything, but after that they just couldn't do it. Once the orphanage was removed from the high-level political visibility, they just kept it going in a quiet way.

What happened in China—it's like I feel like I don't know what's going to happen at my next post; I went to one post. I had to force myself to gather all my steam and figure out who am I, how am I going to make my own statement here, what can I offer in this situation? I didn't have a child at the time. It took a lot of self-examination. As a consequence of the orphanage thing, I became pretty well-known, so when I returned after the evacuation, all kinds of

things started coming my way. I wrote to all these people in the United States that I had contacts with saying, "I'm in China; if you want to do something in China I'd be happy to be your liaison person."

So I got all these contracts to set up programs in China, for, like Special Olympics, which is an organization of _____ (Fenzi nods familiarity with it). I helped them set up the China Special Olympics. AT&T had me do management training. I got a big contract, which was really what happened mostly the second and third year I was there. I ran this women's conference; an organization in the U.S. asked me if I would be their China liaison. Nobody could talk—the Chinese government was under such duress after the Tiananmen Square thing no Americans could get any access. The U.S. Government had no way; USIA couldn't even contact International Visitors landing at bases. So I had sort of a lucky thing in the sense that I was in the embassy and I could say "I can go there in that embassy" and I would have a little bit more leeway.

Also, as you know, I would go to all these places. Like, I went to the All China Women's Federation presenting this conference. We presented the idea just before Tiananmen but we had to do all the work after Tiananmen, which was almost impossible considering the crackdown. But we did it, and every time I'd go to a meeting I would always reiterate, "I'm not American Embassy; I'm an independent person. I do not work there; my husband does but I don't. I have nothing to do with them."

Q: *You didn't give up your diplomatic immunity?*

GRADY: No, I didn't. Now, that's an interesting question. One thing was in China you weren't supposed to work. I did not ask about it. The ambassador knew I was working because he was coming to me for information, so nobody was in the dark about it. I guess, officially speaking—see, I was useful to them, so they let me do it. I don't know whether—

Q: *But you weren't earning money, you were just working—*

GRADY: Well, the first year I was volunteering but then with the China conference I was American-paid—everything was American-paid, even though I would be working in China.

Q: *You were paid for that?*

GRADY: Yes. In fact, the Ambassador's wife spoke at our conference. It was an interesting insight into China's organization in the crackdown. I was going into the All China Women's Federation like the All China Disabled People's Federation, a huge Communist Party organization that had 500,000 little units of the All China Women's Federation. So it takes _____ leadership to give them the word how they do this. I mean it was incredibly political. Every kind of comment we would have to discuss. I mean we were trying to talk about women's issues. It was very hard to get to the truth. Everything was controlled—what they could say was controlled. Their speeches were edited; they had political meetings before the conference, during the conference, after the conference, about what they could and couldn't say, even the delegates. We invited 360 American women. It was the first thing that happened after Tiananmen of any consequence in terms of international exchanges and 360 Chinese women came to us from all over China. It was very frustrating—for me, because

_____ (laughing) and I knew what was happening. I could see, you know, there are really important issues to Chinese women that we couldn't talk about, that never got talked about.

Also American women tend to be very honest, come in and talk about their problems—our country's problems, et cetera. All the Chinese speeches were (mimicking a sweet, gentle voice) "our families are harmonious; marriages are harmonious; there are no problems" because that's what they were told they had to say. So everything was very frustrating, but in fact, I still felt like it was worth doing, because in the hallways and byways and everywhere else people were making all kinds of connections and talking, and it wasn't happening anywhere else. USIA couldn't believe that I could even have it. There have been follow-ups since then. It was a great project to work on because I met some fascinating Chinese women. The International Conference on Women under the UN in 1995 is going to be held in Beijing! So a lot of people have been writing to me about that. I don't know how they'll ever get any information out of them but it should be interesting to see.

I got pregnant right away after I came back from evacuation. (laughing) Ten people in our embassy got pregnant then, three months apart. So during this whole women's conference I kept getting bigger and bigger and when we had the women's conference I was nine months pregnant. It was a women's issue (laughter) _____. And after it got to the end I flew home, very late, to have the baby.

Q: *How do you feel about all this in retrospect? Would you trade that experience for anything?*

GRADY: This is the funny thing: In retrospect, to other people, and even looking at it myself, it sounds like "What a great experience! How could you have ever had that kind of thing? Are you glad you went to China? And your husband brought you there and so _____ otherwise." I just feel sort of like I was lucky I made it on my feet there. That's how I feel. I don't have the confidence—I'm not sure that I can pull it off every single time. Because one of the things I really know is: it is a big hustle. You go in with a blank slate, you have to (both voices in unison) "redo it every time.you move."

Yes. That's the hard part. At one level, I guess you can be anybody you want to be, (laughing). I mean you can sort of decide "at this place I'm going to be a French ski instructor." On one level you're always going to have to redefine yourself to that group of people because you're not built into the system as a political officer, a serious person. I'm very outgoing; I'm a performer; I'm an active—I mean, the way I got into all this was as a dancer and an actress. I'm not a shy person. And then, organizer and _____.

But I found it extremely difficult, and I found it took every resource I had to kind of get my (intake of breath) courage up, get my head together, get my emotions together, and do something, and do it to my own satisfaction. I felt we all had to do it by ourselves. This is why I went around talking to everybody. I don't know how people do it so many times. And is it good? I really felt like it would be easy for me, and I find some points in the beginning where I was definitely going to be doing it, to just be angry at my husband, and resentful and feel like my own life was just getting ruined here.

Interestingly, it was parallel to the Communist system kind of question. Because when people do not have control over their own choices and their own lives, there's something inside of you that dies in a way that's very, very hard to recoup.

Q: *Maybe "die" is not quite the right word. "Frustration." I mean, the hopeless frustration—*

GRADY: —the spiritual deficit that happens because you just think, "I'm not in control." So then everything lacks the luster that it has when you are in control of your own destiny.

Q: *But it seems like you gained control to a very large extent.*

GRADY: I had to force myself. I really feel like it was like a fight against my own depression. I could see I could become very depressed. I met all kinds of people who I would estimate from looking at them and from the way they were depressed; extremely depressed about their life, including a friend of mine whom I became very close with. She and I started meeting together and _____ but she'd been 20 years in the Foreign Service then. Beth had never done anything she wanted to do. I thought to myself, looking at her, "I don't want to be like that."

So the main question I went around to everybody with, was. "How do you make meaning for yourself in this context where you're ripped away from your community, and your family, and your friends, and your identity, and your job? And you're forced every single time to stand by yourself in a completely strange culture, not knowing the language or the customs or anything, and be somebody?" And you know, I still don't know if it's possible to keep doing it—how many times I can handle it again.

Q: *(laughing) Well, not to discourage you but I found that it got harder and harder. Along about the fifth or sixth post—*

GRADY: Your energy runs out.

Q: *—How many more times am I going to have to do this?*

GRADY: How many times can you really make friends and break friends? Set up_____ and break them down? There are things about all that (pause). I just don't think it's good for your life. And your heart suffers. I'm from a big family. I'm also very sort of community oriented, because I've been in the theater and when you're in the theater you (she laughs) tend to be in groups. You're performing in a group, and you have this group thing. So to be on my own, it's just a totally different experience. Still my husband and I have a sort of agreement, although I really see it's going to be difficult, that if it doesn't work for me then we'll get out of it. Because my own life and professional development and my own sense of purpose in my life is very important in our relationship.

Q: *The other thing that's important is the Foreign Service means so much to our husbands! It really is a great career for them.*

GRADY: Well, it's so difficult. What they're in—I can see where it's going to be almost impossible for him to pull out. He's gotten, even in just this short time, so "in" —you know,

it's become so important because of his role in Tiananmen, he can see the light in where he can go. Although I think he tries to empathize, I don't think he understands in a real visceral way what a struggle I went through.

Q: Because he doesn't have it. If he goes from China to Morocco, he walks right into the office with an interpreter and a job and he doesn't have to redefine himself because he's the political officer.

GRADY: Exactly.

Q: I always thought that it took a year to get settled into a post.

GRADY: Yes, I think that that's true. It took me a good year to really be able to teach and work in Chinese—and working that made a big difference: I could teach my classes and do everything in Chinese. I felt much more integrated into the whole thing. The first day—I suppose you've heard a million of these stories! —the day we arrived in China—I'd left thinking, "it's going to be great; I'm going to go to China; I can handle it."

We arrived in Shanghai in the middle of the night. I got off the plane, Jim ran straight to the television; he knows Chinese; he was listening to Chinese; he was so excited. I was walking around the airport, all these armed policemen are all over the place, putting their guns in my face. It was dark; it was dreary; it was green Communist-colored. I got SICK with depression (she laughs). We got back on the plane; he said (breathlessly imitating her husband), "Can you believe we're in China? I'm so excited!" He looked at me—and I burst out crying. From my soul I thought, "I'm going to die here." I was worried because the oppressiveness hits so strongly at dark—it's so dark and dreary, the color and the light, and the people were all sort of—and I thought, "This is not for me; I can't survive here; I'm going to just suffocate."

He didn't know what I was talking about. He didn't know where I was coming from. That was the point at which I had to pull myself out of it—from the first day I arrived I had to get somewhere to get out of it, to get out of there, because I was so "down."

Q: *I don't think you're alone. Twenty-three years after my husband came into the Foreign Service, we went to Recife. That first night when I went upstairs to the bedroom suite and it was musty and our predecessors had put plastic all over the windows, there was no fresh air. They used air-conditioning all the time and it was stuffy and you feel like you're suffocating—I don't think it ever goes away.*

GRADY: The thing that scares me—and this really scares me, and it's why I'm so concerned about the question and I'm so happy hearing somebody looking at it—is that "what does it do to these women's lives?" I've interviewed a lot of women who've lived separately from their husbands, who've gotten divorced, who refuse to go and their husband has to get out, or who suffered great mental depression or breakdown. It's not that uncommon. Then there are some who find it exciting and fascinating and wouldn't have changed living that way for the world.

I think it's too great a personal sacrifice and I don't want to give up my whole life to do this. I can see right now—I just had a little baby and I have a two-year-old—and it's easier, in a sense, to do it when you have a child because you can go and be a mother. With permission

you're allowed to work in this country. I work at Kennedy Center myself part-time _____ I'd love to be able to just take care of Christopher because I've waited all my life to have a child. I can see in the Foreign Service, and in China too, it's much easier to have family there. So that's one thing to do, but when that goes away, then what do you say? Did I make a mistake, am I nowhere?

I have a great fear of turning around and thinking, "I've lost my chance to be alive, (laughing) to live." Not that I want to be this great professional doctor or lawyer or anything; I don't really have that aspiration. I just want to be sure that I'm living with passion and really touching with my own power to share, and live, and—

Q: *Well, it sounds like you did that in China.*

GRADY: I think I did but it took me some effort.

Q: Actually what you did in China in the past we would have called "exemplary" for a Foreign Service wife. You learned the language, you went out in the country, you met the people. you did exactly what we were supposed to have done all through the years as happy volunteers. And now we have that nice little pin to recognize what you've done.

GRADY: Right, and the ambassador, "I'm not offering you $10,000; I'm not even offering you a car. I'm offering you a little pin!" (both laugh heartily)

Q: "If that's all there is I'll take it." Right? (more laughter)

GRADY: I interviewed Sally Lilley, a wonderful woman, and people of her generation just didn't have a problem with it. The other part of this for me, and this is difficult: I'm from a very professionally successful family, my own side. My brother works for the President, my brother-in-law is, like, the number one doctor in _____ ; my sister is, like, the top of National Institutes of Health (NIH). It's very difficult not to be somebody myself. I've always been the artist in the family and I worked for the Kennedy family and the Kennedy Center.

I felt OK. It's just difficult for me to think, "I'll just be traveling around the world here and there with Jim." And not only there _____ but when I come back it is even harder each time if I haven't done something or somehow connected. I've sort of been able to link it all together and make it like, "I have a plan" and that it's been a continuation of my own career. Do you do that every time?

Q: *Let me tell you a little story. I interviewed a woman who I believe was a graduate of the University of Wisconsin and then she had an opportunity to go to Radcliffe. Before Harvard would let women into their Business School, Radcliffe set up a little business instruction organization, a school if you like, and put this select group of women in it. A few years ago they had what must have been their 25th anniversary and they all got together in Cambridge. Do you know who the keynote speaker was? She was the wife of an ambassador. She was not someone who'd been anything on her own and as a matter of fact none of those women—this was the half-generation, I would say, between, those women would be in their 70s now—not one of them had done anything on their own and the Ambassador's wife was the one who was*

asked to be the keynote speaker.

GRADY: _____ luncheon came to me. She's like, "Don't you see how wonderful it is? You can have maids; you can have babysitters; you can have people who clean your house. "She went to Smith and is a very bright woman but she didn't have any of that angst that people of my generation—I'm not unique—

Q: *No, I know you're not.*

GRADY: I think maybe I'm even more flexible than a lot, you know—

Q: *You have a portable career—*

GRADY: Yes—

Q: *—and there are going to be disabled children everywhere and you can --*

GRADY: —and I'm an artist. I ended up teaching ballroom dancing all over China (she laughs) just because I know how to dance. It's like you figure out, "Well, I can do this; if nobody else knows how to do this I'll do it." I had hundreds of students, both Americans and foreigners, and I taught a little Chinese.

Q: *Are the majority of your age in your camp or in the camp of your ambassador's wife who are happy just to go along—*

GRADY: I think more radical than I. Well in the Foreign Service I don't know, but my friends in my generation—

Q: *I was referring to the Foreign Service.*

GRADY: Oh, my friends in the United States cannot understand how I could have done it. They think of me as a professional person: How can I do this? How can I leave and just go with my husband? It doesn't "go" with anything that—my friends are lawyers and—whatever they are. In the Foreign Service I felt there was definitely a cohort of people that were definitely more my age than older, even a little older, people who were like 50 didn't have much trouble about it. But people who are 40 and younger and maybe even younger than I am, I think they have even more trouble. I formed a support group in China of women who were all, like, about my age, who I thought could give me some advice, who could share what they were doing to make themselves survive mentally. This became a very important group. They were all about in the 30s-40s age group. They weren't all Americans; they were from various countries, and some were journalists' wives and some were diplomatic spouses. Everyone was _____; there was no question. I just started it as a little _____ and said, "I am here, trying to figure out how to make my life meaningful."

GRADY: (continuing mid-sentence) and it was all the same question, "What am I doing here? Who am I?" What we did with this group, people would support each other, kind of focusing on what we were and what we do. One woman—you may want to find this book—wrote a book called something like Being A Broad Abroad" —some terrible title like

that—Anyway, she got it published, perhaps with Simon & Schuster. Now she's doing a sequel about children of the Foreign Service abroad; she being Canadian—Robin Pasco (sp?), wife of the political officer at the Canadian Embassy. Anyway when her book came out of our little group she then really got into it. She got a publisher and now she's going all over doing promotion, doing very well. She's doing another book about the children. Another woman started her own business there, printing. So everybody kind of helped one another to kind of get it together, focus on what you could do, not not what you cannot do. And it was really helpful and they're still ongoing; they're very strong there.

Q: Spouse compensation, even if they paid you to be a diplomatic spouse, it wouldn't—

GRADY: No, that doesn't solve _____ are pretty interesting because the taking away of the _____ work. To me that's not the issue. I think there is a way to address it although I'm not sure it's universally true but from my experience a lot of the spouses in the Foreign Service are interesting people. Quite a few are educated women or men. They speak languages; they know about international life.

One of the proposals that I presented in that article that got rejected, after Joan Pryce, was to set up sort of a consulting firm. In other words, market these people; have the State Department market them to businesses, to outside people who are trying to set up in these various countries; use it like a consulting firm.

Q: *That's what the Skills Bank is supposed to do but I guess it doesn't.*

GRADY: Right, it doesn't do it that way. It could. Like, I wanted to do a film project; I have this idea for a film project. I asked the Skills Bank to run sort of a survey through their bank to find out who had a film background. They came up with 65 people all over the world who have some skill in that area. Now, they could be really servicing AT&T or anybody who wants to, say, go into China: how can they get some expertise before going, some cultural training, some background on how to live there—all these kinds of things that are happening. But the State Department isn't taking advantage of it.

Q: *I would think a spouse who has access to Skills Bank could have her own business and just go in and—*

GRADY: I asked Joan Pryce, "How do we do this? Why don't we do this? Couldn't we do this?" She said, "That was first talked about, something like this, but we don't have the resources."

Q: *You have to take it out of this fund; you have to have the business side of _____ but if you have access to the—*

GRADY: Wouldn't it be a great idea?

Q: *Yes.*

GRADY: And then people would feel, I mean, if you could give interesting—the thing that struck me about going to my first post, there aren't any jobs of interest in the American

Embassy. I'm not going to be a mail clerk or whatever they have—

Q: *The Community Liaison Office (CLO) job is the only one—*

GRADY: Everyone asked me to be the CLO. I applied for it, somewhat reluctantly but I did, and I went in feeling that I would get the highest scale. I had a lot of experience in community organizing, in working with people—I just felt like I'm not going to start at the beginning. They assumed because I'd never been in the government that I would be at the lowest scale. I said, "I'm sorry, I can't accept that salary. I'll be happy to talk about this but I want the top of the scale." Cables went back and forth to Washington; nobody would believe, they just wouldn't go to bat for me. So they offered me the job and I said, "No, I'm sorry." It was like a slap in the face; I couldn't take it.

Q: *Was there that much difference in the top and bottom of the scale?*

GRADY: Yes, like $20,000, I guess, and $40,000, full-time job. A really good salary for the embassy, the only one. There was one other job that came up, an FSO slot but he dropped out, and I applied for that. Another woman, who was a good friend of mine but who could read Chinese, got it. People sort of had this attitude—again, it wasn't heavy-handed but there was a subtle attitude, like "What else are you going to do? Why don't you just take one of these jobs?" The personnel department there in the beginning: "Aren't you just going to work in the consular section?"

Q: *Why do women do those jobs?*

GRADY: I don't know. Well, I looked at a lot of the women. One of the things: you don't have to ask yourself the question. You know, if you're just going, doing blah-blah-blah, whatever it is, at least you're occupied. You don't go through this existential thing, which I really did go through and I think people who don't have a job do. Because you have the time and space and you're kind of forced into this confrontation with yourself.

Q: *Tell me what makes it different. If you had asked me, before I started this project, "Were there any career women in the 1920s, 30s and 40s?" I probably would have said no. Well, of course the '30s were in the great depression; women did give up their jobs, then men needed the jobs for their families. But women gave up careers in the 1920s, in the 1940s, in the 1950s, more reluctantly in the 1960s. Is it just a societal expectation now that didn't exist earlier, when it was assumed that eventually a woman would marry and have children?*

GRADY: I definitely think one thing is the numbers of people that are in the workforce now, as opposed to the 50s, are dramatic.

Q: *It really is sign of the peer pressure—*

GRADY: It is. Because the definition of yourself these days comes much more from a career or your productive work than through your spouse and I think Hillary Clinton and this whole debate that's happening demonstrates that it's not resolved. There are a lot of people out there who keep fighting this issue, but—

Q: *I've been thinking—I don't know how busy she is, and she probably wouldn't do anything before the election and then she wouldn't do it after the election, but it's too bad that earlier on we didn't get her to come in and sit down, as part of her husband's broadening his foreign affairs background, have her sit down with a group of us and just let her know what the situation is vis-à-vis the foreign service spouse today. I still think we should do it—*

GRADY: Well, get in—

Q: *Yes, I would say get in. Because with her there should be a breakthrough of some sort.*

GRADY: Yes, she's got to be empathetic. She represents the struggle; she's got it; she's a professional person. I don't understand that struggle in the United States. I can't understand why people would be critical. I mean how can they make this criticism that she "doesn't care about her family because she works?" She cares about children; she legislated children's issues, but because she's a working person she's been attacked? I don't understand it; I think it's going to backfire because people of my age group and younger, I don't think they can even understand that attack.

Q: *I was so happy when that little 12-year-old boy won his case, the one in Florida? I thought that was good.*

GRADY: I feel like State isn't really "up" to the modern world. They're just sort of hush-hush about the difficulties of spouses. They don't even want to hear from them. And even women—and I don't know why they keep inviting them to speak, for example, Joan Pryce. She said to me when I was speaking, "Try not to say you rejected the CLO job, try not to be too negative. A lot of people are going to take those jobs at the Embassy, so don't put those jobs down when you speak."

Q: *But they should be put down because they're NOTHING jobs!*

GRADY: You know she's coaching me on the "Don't tear into them too much, just show the positive side of things." Even when I did these interviews and said I was going to publish this article, people were scared. They were saying, "Maybe you better not put that in" —you know, things like, "I told my husband I'm not going over (laughing)." "Oh, you better not put that in." Or this one woman had a nervous breakdown and she said, "I don't want that in." I can understand that, but the stories dramatically set in real stories are strong. Everybody was afraid because the system still has this sort of control over people's jobs, the husband's job.

Q: *Right. Getting back to what I said earlier, this means so much to our husbands that you really don't want to go through the rest of your life thinking that you've "ruined his career" —*

GRADY: I know.

Q: *—and that's the dilemma too, I think.*

GRADY: A lot of women who are of my generation, who've come back, are forcing their husbands out. —I don't know—I think that's really a hard choice to make, a very hard choice

to make. It seems like it's often very difficult to ask the system to adjust the question—you know, this kind of consulting firm, or trying to make _____ something.

Q. *I don't think that's asking too much. Why do you think that's asking too much?*

GRADY: I don't think it's asking too much. I think that the system, this whole monolithic thing, is hard to move.

Q: *Well, bureaucracy moves very slowly.*

GRADY: I guess. Although—well, you've seen it. There have been many changes that are actually to the advantage of spouses.

Q: *Well, the great change, of course, was that directive in 1972. Of course there was a crying need for that because here Gloria Steinem was putting out Ms Magazine, and you still had an ambassador's wife who could tell a young wife to come over and set her luncheon table or bring cookies. There again, bringing the cookies—that's just a short-gap thing too, because that only came in World War II. You see, a lot of the overseas mentality of the noble little wife rolling up her sleeves and bundling up used clothing and things like that stems from after the war when the Department expanded with Agency for International Development (AID) and other organizations. They took all of these women overseas and they had to have something to do.*

They were from more modest strata of society—not to say they were blue-collar. It's just that the people you had in the service before were of Kennedy caliber as far as their financial style was concerned. Then suddenly you had Middle America and they were accustomed to women's clubs and they needed women's clubs. That was their support system and they needed something to do. They needed to have some control over their children's schools; they needed a church, and they needed all these "little America" things. So they did them. They were in great numbers—there were 450 American women in Greece, 500 in India, and in Pakistan—broad-based American communities. That still lingered on, you see, into the '70s, but The Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide (AAFSW) as an advocacy organization was founded before Betty Friedan wrote <u>The Feminine Mystique</u>. Congress cut off spouse training because there were no authorized funds for spouse training but the Director of the Foreign Service found funds here, and found funds there, to fund Mrs. Regina Blake to do spouse training. I think it included language—I have the Congressional Record dealing with that.

That spurred the women on to form an advocacy organization. Before that they were a very highly social, selective group; they didn't invite everybody to their meetings. (laughter) There was a great deal of resentment and resistance to forming The Association of American Foreign Service Women (AAFSW). Male spouses now should be brought in; AAFSW should change its name—I'm not talking out of school—it should become "Foreign Service Associates;" they should encourage male spouses; they should have evening and Saturday meetings, and they should draw on the strength of the male presence as spouses.

GRADY: Absolutely.

Q: *And they weren't doing it. (overlapping voices). Otherwise the male spouses eventually will get themselves together and form their own organization and then you'll have these two spouse organizations; which is perfectly ridiculous.*

GRADY: The other point is that I don't think the State Department when they're making their decisions take spouses' rights into account at all. I ended up getting an excellent job at the end. I got this job in February of my third year there, an excellent job; I made more than my husband got with the Canadian International Development Agency, as a human resource development specialist. Because I had a reputation, they found out about me and I applied and got the job. We thought we were going to be there a few more years, so I took it. Then the State Department pulled my husband out; they said he couldn't extend and we had to go back. So I had to tell them, "I'm only there for three more months" and they let me do it anyway. But there was no taking into account that, first of all, I had an excellent position, that I had a contract for two years, that I was set up fine in terms of my family life, my babysitter, that we didn't want to leave! There was just no accounting—

Q: *Did your husband ask for an extension?*

GRADY: Yes. The ambassador, the DCM, everybody went to bat.

Q: *Why was all that turned down?*

GRADY: Pressure, somebody really wanted Jim; they sort of slam-dunked him back—

Q: *Because, you see, they were in Washington where a lot of the action happens.*

GRADY: —it all happens. But Jim wrote in one of the _____ about _____ but he said, "It doesn't matter; that's not going to happen at all. I should just sit on my own political experience and what I'm doing and people I know." (overlapping voices)

Q: *Why don't you write an article about that?*

GRADY: That's interesting...

Q: *story absolutely correct, exactly what happened.*

GRADY: Financially we lost so much money because of it. I was going to make a terrific amount of money, tax-free.

Q: *I think you should try that article. Sometimes they'll take an article and hold it. I have one coming in shortly that they've had for six months and they'll work me in when they need it. I would try that.*

GRADY: Some people in my position would say, "Well, I'll just stay; you go."

Q: *That was going to be my question: Why didn't you—well, you had the baby, of course—*

GRADY: Also I was hired in-country with the housing from my husband's side; the

Canadians didn't have to pay all that. So I never pushed it with the Canadians. I guess I could have. The woman who hired me was also married. She was an officer but her husband was in Foreign Service. She understood; it wasn't an embarrassing thing to have to say, "Well, my husband's job is taking me out, so I have to leave; I have to break the contract." Luckily I think here I've hardly even talked about it; here I don't even bring up the fact that when I left my job. I just sort of griped to tell them that. To say that you're in the Foreign Service in a job is like death!

Q: *I know. There is no solution, is there? Really?*

GRADY: I don't know; I really don't. I mean, _____ solution is not do it. Well I meant within it, yes. I wish there was. That's why I'm so excited about what you're doing and I really would like to get involved in the battle. There has to be. Otherwise the Foreign Service is a dead issue. Because in the modern world the modern man, or woman, who has a spouse is just not going to settle for this. They can't drag this person _____ around the world; they won't go. They aren't going to live that way any more. So they'll address it better.

Q: *I think you were a marvelous example for the Chinese as an American woman. Now, the Department should recognize that. You were representing America.*

GRADY: The ambassador definitely did and I guess to a degree the Secretary of State did; I got this little award.

Q: *So maybe there should be some correlation?*

GRADY: That is you're right. It's not only the whole idea of preparing Americans or American companies for going abroad, which there is a market for. Maybe not a big enough one but there is a market for that: I've done some training courses for these firms' people who are leaving for China. The whole idea that these people are not just sitting there; they're representing the United States and could be doing much, much more to do it—

Q: *And that representation involves more than giving little candlelit dinner parties with crisp white damask napkins. And that—I was amazed at a couple of "Letters to the Editor"—I can't recall if they were published in the "Foreign Service Journal" or whether they were just amongst those received by the "Journal"—I was absolutely stunned that two of the men who responded were still back in the antediluvian day when the only way a woman could represent the United States abroad was by giving a dinner party.*

I hope that this book that I'm working on, if it does nothing else, will break down that misconception because (in this project) we don't even talk about little dinner parties and we've already written 258 pages—

GRADY: Well, the point of your book, I'm sure one of your major points, shows that these people who married the Foreign Service officer are interesting people—

Q: *The best and the brightest marry the best and the brightest, right? As a rule; not always, we find—*

GRADY: Obviously everybody says—and I guess it's there and I try to avoid it—is the attitude is there. There's an attitude toward spouses that's denigrating.

Q: *Where is that coming from because we are now in 1992*?

GRADY: I don't know.

Q: *Eventually there's going to come a time when all of this old guard—you see, my husband retired at 58 in 1985*.

GRADY: Did you ask him to retire?

Q: *Well, actually I asked him to retire when he was medevaced from his last post in '84, and he said he would. It was all right; it was the stress of a very difficult situation. He didn't have a heart attack. We were just in Trinidad. Well _____ wouldn't go any farther away from home. I'd been in Brazil thousands of miles and dozens of hours away from my children for three and a half years. (some details about the children and their careers) My son has definitely profited from his Foreign Service experience in his own profession. (refers to interviews in a survey about where FS children fetch up today)*

GRADY: Having a child when you raise all those questions _____ about children of Foreign Service officers whether they'd redo it if they could change their lives. Mostly they want to do it themselves—

Q: *Interestingly enough, my children went to boarding school a lot of the time, in Switzerland and in Morocco but we just felt from the very beginning (interruption to talk about Grady's sister, Alexandra Matson).*

GRADY: One thing about that: I was radically opposed to getting so involved in the Embassy and that might have been a mistake. I would probably be different about that at the next post.

Q: *Well, you had your support group, though. You got the women together—*

GRADY: Yes, I created my own from listening in these Foreign Service Institute (FSI) classes that I've been speaking in. I listen to the other people and they all say get involved in the community. I can see where it certainly helps as long as you find people that are like you somewhat but it doesn't really have to keep it sort of at arm's length. Everyone was so negative at that embassy in China when we first got there; I just didn't want to be around that attitude, but it changed.

Q: *It's hard when you go into a situation like that.*

GRADY: Yes, very hard.

Q: *Then you feel—at least I used to feel—well, why should I turn myself inside out for these women? Why don't they get off their dime and do something on their own? And that doesn't*

exactly endear you (laughing) to your husband's colleagues.when you go off and do things on your own. At least it didn't in my generation, and I admit I wasn't always careful. As you say, you're redefining yourself; you're "here I go again." The thing that I envied were the people who, in the old days, took their nursemaids and their servant with them from post to post and if the Foreign Service could do anything for us it could do that.

GRADY: _____ the Chi

Q: *Well, yes, and then to start all over again with someone new, and in a different language—*

GRADY: That's for the kids too.

Q: *—but in the old days the people took their governesses and their nursemaids—*

GRADY: They had money.

Q: *—yes, they had money, and they just took them with them.*

GRADY: A woman whom I'm very friendly with, a Foreign Service spouse, divorced her husband because of it all, I guess. She's maybe 70, a really neat lady. Her name is Holly Truxler, something like that. Her husband was Ambassador to Ethiopia. We talk about this a lot, and she said, for her, "Why fight it? Why not enjoy it? Why not go to whatever country and horseback-ride or photography or make films—just do whatever you want." She keeps telling me that. "Why are you hassling in your life so much? What is life really about? Is it about you and your title?" No, it isn't really about your title. She's right: if you could somehow free yourself from societal pressures that you're supposed to be somebody and do something—

Q: *See, that's harder for your generation than it was for ours.*

GRADY: And she apparently just had a delightful time. And people that I've met

Q: *—then why did she divorce him?*

GRADY: Because he was married to his job, so she says.

Q: *So she had a good time to a point.*

GRADY: Yes, it was an interesting—but she's got friends. They're interesting people; they've been all over the world, but they seem (laughing) to have partied through life _____, got into the culture and the history but really enjoyed it, no question about it. Being in the United States the pressures are great—

Q: *Because your peers who have moved on. My equivalent to that was moving back here and finding that our contemporaries not only had bought their houses, they were buying their summer homes. And here we hadn't even bought a house yet. That used to bother me a little bit; I felt that I was being left behind. The issue just transferred to you personally.*

GRADY: I think if I'd gone to professional school, like I was a lawyer, I think it would be—

Q: *Much worse, of course.*

GRADY: I couldn't finally go; I just finally couldn't take it with me. My roommate from college lives two minutes from here. And you, since I'm at home, we've been having a dialogue. She's a lawyer _____ but she doesn't have_____ kind of give up working.

Q: *Well, I think you'll be able to take whatever you're doing wherever you go, really.*

GRADY: I hope.

Q: *I think so*.

GRADY: I'm going to try again. We're going out next summer. (She thinks possibly to Israel, or Greece.)

End of interview