

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

**MARGARET KERR**

*Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi  
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**INTERVIEW**

*Q: This is Jewell Fenzi on Monday, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1991. I'm interviewing Margaret Kerr at my home, 1824 16<sup>th</sup> Street Northwest in Washington. We'll have to test your microphone. Say a few words, say your name.*

KERR: I'm Margaret Kerr.

*Q: Now let's see if this is working. I would always have to check to make sure that all of these contacts are really firm because if they're not firm we can get great deal of static. And it's another icebreaker with an interview, is to make sure that your equipment is working properly. One of my last interviews, a woman said, "Are you doing this just for me, or...?" I said, "No, I do this with everybody because you really don't want to have static or a contact that's not made and lose the quality of your interview.*

KERR: Yes, one of the tapes I was trying to transcribe had a lot of hammering the background. It made it difficult to hear.

*Q: It's very difficult. Very difficult.*

KERR: And I suggested \_\_\_\_\_ would be a marvelous one to interview.

*Q: Well, now, is she coming here?*

KERR: She's coming here in the spring, so she might consent to do it.

*Q: Do you know her?*

KERR: Yes, I knew her before she was married.

*Q: Oh, alright. Then I was in Tokyo when you were in Tokyo. Then I would suggest that before you leave today, let me give you some stationary, and you write her on our stationary and ask her for an interview. We would be very interested in interviewing her when she's here. Will you be here when she's here?*

KERR: I think so.

*Q: Oh, fine. Good.*

KERR: So I'll try. And Sheila \_\_\_\_, whom I met in Tokyo but didn't know well, would also be...

*Q: She has been mentioned before. Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_?*

KERR: Yes.

*Q: Yes. She and Frances Adams live in the same cul de sac...*

KERR: Oh, good.

*Q: ...in Palisades. I hope to interview Frances Adams at the National Democratic Club, so if you approach Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ at the same time, that would be very good because they know each other. And things like that sometimes are valuable, you know, whereas if I just went, say, to one of them alone or you went to one alone, we might not get the same enthusiastic response as we would if they both thought that they would –*

KERR: I don't belong to the Democratic Club. Do you?

*Q: Yes, I do.*

KERR: My friend Selma \_\_\_\_ does. I could go with her.

*Q: Well, no, what we could do is we could—I know Mrs. Adams goes frequently, and we could invite Mrs. Adams and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ to lunch there someday. That's a good entre, too. With our generation, often times a social setting is a very good first approach, whereas with Christy Miller's generation, for instance, you don't need a social setting at all for an interview. I mean, you can interview across a desk with those younger women. But a social situation, I find, helps. I'm leaving this on tape so you can listen to it.*

KERR: Sure.

*Q: Have you done interviewing before?*

KERR: No. That's why I'm scared.

*Q: Oh, well, why don't we just start with yours. And, of course, my first question was did your husband come in under the Wriston Program?*

KERR: Yes.

*Q: He did? Do you want to comment on that? I mean, how were you received? Other women have talked about this, and this is why I'm very interested in your observations and your opinions. How were you received as a Wriston wife by the established traditional Foreign Service women?*

KERR: They were accepting people of middle-upper level, and he'd been in the government since '35, with agriculture and various other agencies, and finally it was state. And then he decided to go to Foreign Service under that.

*Q: And at that point, you really hadn't expected to go abroad, had you?*

KERR: No. He had studied Spanish as a language, but he studied for years in German. And when it came time to be examined, they only asked him one question in Spanish, to which he replied easily, "*Yo hablo español muy poco.*" And that was it. They never asked him a word in German or French, which he had.

*Q: Did you have any language training at all?*

KERR: Only that I'd had in college. What surprised me then, and does even more now in recollection, was that I had no briefing whatsoever—there was nothing for wives. We simply went—

*Q: Cold. You simply went cold to New Delhi in 1949. And how old were your children then?*

KERR: Very young.

*Q: Very young. So they could go along to—*

KERR: Two, four, six, and eight.

*Q: And eight. And what did you find there? That was 1949—that was after independence?*

KERR: Yes. They had just gotten independence. And I found the children were the best introduction to Indian society. I met more people through them than any other way—through schools and playgroups and anything else. And they had made friends easily, and I made friends with the women that way, through the children, too. It was the best—

*Q: Indian women.*

KERR: Mm-hmm. One Indian who became our doctor had studied in Chicago her English and her American. And she became a very good friend, and her husband was the head of railways, so we got around India that way.

*Q: Did you travel with her, or?*

KERR: Occasionally.

*Q: Occasionally? Uh-huh.*

KERR: We got to a few of the Indian states. I remember at one point, one of the maharajas having lunch at our house asked my husband if the United States wouldn't like to buy an Indian state, like the British had done. Asked, wouldn't the US be interested? Of course, he'd say he would have to take it up with the ambassador.

*Q: Sort of like adopt a portion of a highway today. I take it we did not buy a state.*

KERR: Oh, no.

*Q: The school—was American school? International school?*

KERR: No, Indian.

*Q: International? No, Indian school? So the children went to—*

KERR: Run by an Indian. It was mostly Indian national. Just a small school.

*Q: And there were children from other embassies there?*

KERR: Yes. And then we sent the oldest child to a hill station in Mussoorie, which was American English-run. He didn't like that.

*Q: How old was he?*

KERR: But he was only eight then.

*Q: Eight, uh-huh. Did he stay there, or did he come back, or?*

KERR: He stayed for a couple years. Didn't like it. He now says he's been in 38 schools.

*Q: 38 schools?*

KERR: Don't believe it. That was what he claimed.

*Q: Ahh, that seems like an awful lot for—let's see. You had one, two, three, four, five posts. I think it seems like 38.*

KERR: But in Japan, I used the Calvert System. No, that was in Burma we used the Calvert System. It was partly in Japan too. In Japan, there was an army school, but we were not allowed to send our children without paying, which all the poor Foreign Service people objected to, but that's the way it was. We objected, saying we pay taxes, we support these schools—why should we have to pay for each kid? That was when I started—no, first we sent them to Japanese English schools in Yokohama and they had to go by train. And then I taught them myself with the Calvert System. It was very good; I think they were—

*Q: All five of them?*

KERR: They did well on that. Yes. I thought they did well.

*Q: Were other mothers doing that or did you just teach them by yourself?*

KERR: No, I was the only one.

*Q: You were the only one?*

KERR: That was the drawback. They didn't have friends their own age, except the Japanese who lived near us, and there weren't too many of those, so we were pretty far

out of Tokyo in a house which had been meant to be as close to the airport. But they did alright. And when we got to Tehran, we put them in the army school.

*Q: Still, you had to pay the tuition, or had that changed?*

KERR: No. I think it had changed by then. We didn't have to pay. But I thought it was the poorest education they had. I think that's why one of them still can't spell. And in Burma, we put them in the Burmese schools, which were very good—English-trained, the Burmese teachers. And that was very good schooling. I think by then we sent the oldest one home to school, military school, and then the hill school. That was from Tehran. And we thought he was not doing well.

And Tehran, I think, was the only post we didn't like because the feeling walking down through streets and through the bazaars that you might have a knife in your back at any moment.

*Q: And that really wasn't at a time of turmoil there either, was it?*

KERR: No, no. The Shah was still there.

*Q: The Shah was still there.*

KERR: But you still felt this animosity toward Americans. But, as I say, the children were the best entre to these other cultures you could have, which is why I urged people with children to go into the Foreign Service.

*Q: You took most of them—all of them—to all four posts?*

KERR: Yes.

*Q: New Delhi, Tokyo, Tehran, and Rangoon. Well, they all turned out well, they all have professions.*

KERR: Yes, they all did well.

*Q: But they did have quite a varied background, didn't they?*

KERR: They did. I remember in India, the Dongons [sp?]<sup>2</sup>—he was DCM, I guess. My husband worked with him, and they said that when they joined the Foreign Service, which must have been twenty years before that, they had not only to pay their own way,

but pay for their own furniture, everything else. So it seemed as if we were living a fairly plush life, by comparison. But we had no commissary, of course, no PX. No, we had to order all our food from home.

*Q: I wanted to ask you something.*

KERR: But we loved India! And it's quite true that the hardship posts are the ones where you make the firmest friends. Didn't you find that?

*Q: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. And India was—you consider that economic. Okay, so your husband must have been—was he economic consular?*

KERR: Yes, in Burma. In India, he was—what, I don't know what his title was. He was just in the economic section.

*Q: Economic officer, I guess. Okay. Econ—I want to establish that as a post, to political econ officer, econ consular, and deputy assistant secretary of state.*

KERR: And I can tell one dragon lady—sorry?

*Q: Well, that's—absolutely, and that's why let's get back to Tehran, because that must have been where you had your dragon lady, right?*

KERR: No.

*Q: No?*

KERR: No, that was in India.

*Q: India, yes. Absolutely. I did want to ask you about that, because I wanted to discuss her because she comes up—*

KERR: Oh, does she?

*Q: Time and time and time and time again in interviews. And the only kind thing that anyone has ever said about her is that she just simply wasn't interested in what her husband was doing. And I don't think that's an excuse for rude and unladylike behavior.*

KERR: No. This woman was amusing, I thought. I went to call on her in proper Emily Post fashion with a gift, and she kept me waiting for an hour. That was awful.

*Q: She kept you waiting for an hour when you went to—?*

KERR: No, that I didn't mind.

*Q: I hope you had a book.*

KERR: The first party we were invited to at the residence, which was outdoors, of course. We were standing around with the other guests and talking when Mrs. Henderson had somebody call me over to speak to me, and I went over and she said, "Margaret, no first secretary's wife ever talks to anybody above her own rank." I said, well, it was a Chinese I was talking to and somebody we had known before in the states. It was an old friend. "Well, you don't talk again certainly." And we got home, and I'd said to my husband, "I don't think I'm cut out for the Foreign Service. I think I ought to go home." Wouldn't that shatter you?

*Q: Well, of course!*

KERR: The first party you're invited to at the embassy, it's—

*Q: How were you supposed to know who the first secretaries were? I mean, did they have labels?*

KERR: No, of course not.

*Q: Oh, outrageous.*

KERR: Well, it was just one of the funny stories. When we left, she came to call the night before we were leaving. We were still packing, and the children, and she looked around our lanai, our veranda, all the plants we had, and saying to her chauffeur, "I will take that, and that, and that, and that."

*Q: Were those your personal plants?*

KERR: Yes!

*Q: And you offered them to her?*

KERR: No!



*Q: Were you planning to leave them for your successor?*

KERR: Yes. What could you say? That was fairly typical.

*Q: Now, did she come to call on you to say goodbye or did she know that—why did she come to say goodbye to you? I mean, that seems—for all that I've heard, that seems very unusual.*

KERR: I think she did this to pick up whatever she could. I know she left Tehran, where they had been before us, owing bills all over the place, and our friends who were there said—

*Q: Personal bills?*

KERR: Yes. Shoes and clothes. And friends we had who were there said, “We’re leaving you.” Our friends, the Hendersons. “Good luck.” And I think the embassy took care of that, but these stories were rife! I heard about them anywhere and it didn’t seem to do her husband’s job the slightest harm.

*Q: No! Absolutely not.*

KERR: It’s astonishing.

I think she was an example for all of us that it really didn’t matter what you did as far as your husband’s career was concerned, because he would never have gotten a promotion if her behavior had any effect whatsoever on his career.

*Q: What was your relationship like with her from day to day? Did you see her frequently?*

KERR: No. No, she never saw the embassy wives.

*Q: She never had any—?*

KERR: No, there were never meetings.

*Q: Did the DCM’s wife?*

KERR: Mm-hmm. She was nice. Mrs. Donovan.

*Q: Mrs. Donovan.*

KERR: I think she's still in Switzerland. Yes, she was very nice, but we never had any formal meetings of the wives. I had some of them collected on our veranda for Indian dancing, which we did, which was great fun. But other than that, there were no formal meetings of any kind, and there was no American society or association. You were really on your own.

*Q: On your own! And went with no orientation.*

KERR: No orientation whatsoever, not even one meeting.

*Q: Did the women, in neighborly fashion, just as they would in the United States, sort of take you in tow when you arrived and said this is where you buy rice and this is where you buy—?*

KERR: No, nothing.

*Q: Nothing! You had to—*

KERR: And the houses were scattered, except for the secretaries and people who lived down there at the embassy, so that you couldn't pay a neighborly call. And the only communications, seeing that telephones were so poor, was all your servants taking messages around. So there wasn't much organization then. Well, they threw us into contact with other embassy people, and with Indians. Sometimes we saw more Indians than we did anybody, which was fine.

*Q: Did you ever, at any point, really seriously consider coming home? I mean, did you—?*

KERR: No. Just that one. That one night was all. I look back on it now with amusement.

*Q: Well, fortunately, we have to. I mean, there's no point in being embittered.*

KERR: My husband had an amusing story on her. She had been talking about going into a grocery store, a "Piggly Wiggly" she called it. And she said, "You know what they have there? I found fresh mice." M-A-I-Z-E.

*Q: Oh, "maize."*

KERR: She liked that.

*Q: Now, where was the Piggly Wiggly? It wasn't in—*

KERR: No, she was talking about having been in the states, of how funny it was that she could buy fresh “mice.” So, the other story on her, and this is the only one which I find amusing, too—we had her for lunch one day when the ambassador was out of town. And I was having a struggle because it was a holiday and we couldn't check with the protocol office. There was nobody at the embassy. Because I didn't know how to see people. We had the Egyptian ambassador, the head of the Indian army, and another ambassador and Mrs. Henderson. And I couldn't figure out who ranked whom. And there was no way to check it. Somebody said, “Well, it's according to the number of guns.” I don't know how to find that number of guns at that point. But I thought then, “This is why people serve buffet.” Especially in India. Because you don't know who ranks whom and you don't know who eats what. The servants would tie little ribbons on the backs of chairs. A yellow one meant no eggs, a red one meant no beef, a green one meant no pork. And one would be something else, would be vegetarian. But it was the only way you had to tell. So it seemed to me, this is why everybody serves buffet. Very few sit-down meals, ever.

*Q: So what did you do? Did you have a buffet?*

KERR: No, they decided the Egyptian ambassador ranked everybody. And then they—but Mrs. Henderson was the problem, because we didn't know where to seat her that she wouldn't be offended, whatever we did.

*Q: She had no rank, really. But in her mind, she did. Right.*

KERR: And then you could see her—when we asked her what she wanted to drink, she would look around and see what would be the most unlikely thing you'd have. And sure enough, she'd get on it. She wanted cherry heering. We did not have cherry heering. I mean, little things like that.

*Q: So, she really was aware of what she was doing.*

KERR: Oh, yes.

*Q: Well, now, why was she doing that?*

KERR: I don't know. Just to draw attention to herself. I think she needed it. And she got it.

*Q: Was this because she was a foreign-born spouse, in part?*

KERR: I think so.

*Q: In part because he was so successful and so well-known in the service, and she couldn't bask in the glow of his success. Was that it?*

KERR: I think so. I think she probably felt herself a foreigner, and she didn't know how to mix. You could try, but—well, anyhow, this shouldn't be on tape.

*Q: Well, yes it should! I mean, her—well, where did you seat her? We never finished the dinner party.*

KERR: I think on Cariappa's right, because she was fond of him. He was the head of the Indian army and a very nice man. C-A-R-I-A-P-P-A.

*Q: C-A-R-I-A-P-P-A. Cariappa. And did she behave herself during that?*

KERR: Yes.

*Q: Uh-huh? My next question is—*

KERR: I really didn't mean to get on that.

*Q: No, no, I really do want to talk about Mrs. Henderson because I've gotten sort of fascinated with the woman from what I've heard of everyone. I have two questions. Did she act the same way with the host country people that she did with her own embassy people?*

KERR: Mm-hmm.

*Q: She really was high-handed and--?*

KERR: Mm-hmm.

*Q: Well, that must've undone a great deal of the good that he did.*

KERR: Well, I think they just—she was very pretty, after all, and she could be very, very winning, very gracious when she wanted to be, to exert herself. And I just think they just took her as she came, that was all.

*Q: But what about her husband, was he aware of this?*

KERR: I don't know. I don't know if he was or not.

*Q: How could he not be aware of this behavior?*

KERR: He was so impatient with the Indians, a lot of the time. I remember Andy said that when he came into the office to see him at one point, he said, "Turn on the fan." And Andy pushed it, and he said, "No, of course not." He was looking for the on switch. "Look for the no button!"

*Q: Mm-hmm.*

KERR: Anyway, we did enjoy India. And the Indians.

*Q: I have one more question: the bills that were left unpaid. Were those his also, or just hers?*

KERR: No. Just hers.

*Q: Just hers! And for personal things, like clothes?*

KERR: This is what we were told by the people who had been there.

*Q: And the embassy took care of that, now, didn't they?*

KERR: I don't know how.

*Q: Loy Henderson, eventually, reimbursed them?*

KERR: I suppose. I just don't know; I probably shouldn't even mention it.

*Q: No, I think you absolutely should mention that. That's absolutely shocking.*

KERR: Yes, it was interesting, what went on. Interested us. The things they said you had to do for the foreign service! Amusing Loy Henderson, my husband played guitar and

sang. At that time it was a very new thing, so people would ask us to come and bring the guitar, and he said, "I think we're paying our way like this." But Loy asked him to come and sing for a memorial service he was having for the death of his father back here. And asked me to play the organ, which I did. So there we were, playing music for the memorial service for Loy's father. Which was alright.

*Q: That must've been in 1960 when you were here.*

KERR: No, no. This was in India.

*Q: Oh, in India, he had a memorial service for his father!*

KERR: In India, we thought it was a nice thing to do and we didn't mind doing it, of course. And the other thing, which I thought was kind of beyond the call of duty, was when we were in Tehran, the ambassador's wife asked me to come over and help her bake the poodles to standard size. Big, black poodle. And I thought, at the time, "This, I think, really is beyond the call of duty."

*Q: And you didn't?*

KERR: No, I did! I didn't mind most of the calls. You know, you expected it.

*Q: What were some of the other things you were asked to do?*

KERR: Oh, you know, the usual things. Just come over and help out when they needed help. I didn't mind that; I would go somewhere, do something, or entertain someone. You expected that.

*Q: Did she invite you or ask you as a friend?*

KERR: Yes.

*Q: Call and say, "Oh, can you come over and help me with the poodles?"*

KERR: Yes. She couldn't get anyone else to do it so she asked me. It's alright. We lived nearby.

*Q: But still, it obviously wrinkled a little bit.*

KERR: It was a funny thing to remember. I remember when we announced to our friends that we were going into foreign service. They said, “Oh, but you must play bridge!” And we said we didn’t. “But we’ll teach you,” said they. So, we went over for a lesson at our best friends’, and almost came to an argument over something. We decided then and there: no bridge! And got along perfectly well without it.

*Q: But your music must have been an entrée. You played piano, obviously.*

KERR: Yes. Well, I didn’t—I had time to spend with the children, and any time I had leftover I’d spend with the piano.

*Q: I do have one question about going abroad as a [inaudible] wife. Any number of other women who came into the foreign service laterally like that have felt like they were discriminated against by some of the traditional established foreign service wives. They also received a very compassionate attitude; these women attempted to draw them into diplomatic life. You’ve got both sides of the coin. Did you have—it sounds like you were sort of on your own in New Delhi, and it didn’t matter if your husband had been [inaudible].*

KERR: No. Peggy Parsons, and Jeff Parsons—and Peggy was helpful. The only one who did any organizing for the embassy wives at all. Yeah, I was impressed with her. After a dinner party, she went home, immediately wrote her thank-you note before she went to bed, and had it delivered the next morning. Gosh, she was a [inaudible], but she was mighty powerful.

*Q: Efficient.*

KERR: Mm, very efficient.

*Q: Now, how did someone like that come across with the Indian community as opposed to Mrs. Henderson?*

KERR: Oh, she was very active and well-liked, I think.

*Q: Mm-hmm. Well, what role did your music play in helping you—well, of course you have five children, and you had a staff of six, seven, eight, ten servants. That in itself must’ve taken up—those two factors must’ve taken up a great deal of your time.*

KERR: My time, yes.

*Q: And maybe you didn't have an awful lot of time for music.*

KERR: No. Dancing was more fun than anything else, and of course you studied Hindi as you could and spoke what little Hindustani you had been able to pick up.

*Q: Did someone come to your home and give you lessons?*

KERR: Yes. That was nice.

*Q: And you paid for that yourself?*

KERR: Of course. And that was fun. My husband didn't bother to learn language at any post because he said the people he dealt with in the economic sphere all had English, and there was no point in his wasting his time on it. But I found it necessary wherever I was, just for shopping, if nothing else, you know? Going to bazaars, and things. So I always studied wherever we were.

*Q: Well, I've always maintained that we needed the language more than our husbands because they always—my husband was also an economic officer. And in the rare instances in a country where a businessman didn't speak English, he had an interpreter right there.*

KERR: Yes. Well, in Japan, when we would get outside the city, my husband said that the only Japanese phrase he needed was, "Do you have any cold beer?" Nothing else he needed. And in India, of course, everybody spoke English at that time. In Iran, we didn't get out in the country very much.

*Q: Was that because you were uncomfortable?*

KERR: It wasn't easy to get around. We never got up to the sea up north. It was just very difficult in Iran, so that there wasn't the—we did get to Shiraz, and that's about all. Travel was just difficult. I know my husband was DCM on the day when one of the eight people was killed in the highlands. And when the ambassador got back that night, that was Seymour [inaudible], he said, "Why didn't you call me?" And my husband said just how was he to call? There was no communication at all. Anybody couldn't send marine guards up in the hills to see about this. Difficult, difficult post any way you looked at it.

Oh, an interesting thing about India—one of the amusing things I remembered was, it was our first experience with other nationalities, other cultures, and we were amazed at the British and how well they entertained, how well they adjusted. But most impressed



with how good the Australians were about introducing people at a large party. They would go around the room and say, “Oh, this is Mr. So-and-So of sand such, a job in the department of Indian affairs. Mr. So-and-So.” And introduce you at the same time! By the time they’d finished with everybody, you knew pretty well who was there. And I thought, “What a good thing to teach our foreign service people! Just simply how to introduce your guests to each other.”

*Q: So, you really learned by observing.*

KERR: Yes! You learn by doing, by observing. It’s the only way.

*Q: Tell me about your day in India where you had five children and how many people working for you in the house. You must’ve done a great deal of management and organization!*

KERR: I was impressed with the women’s talk at night. It was all about servants, food—not that that was it. And the difficulty--before dinner, the women would go to one side of the living room, the veranda, the men to the other.

*Q: This was dinner parties.*

KERR: Yes. After dinner, you would try to reverse it. It was reversed all right! The men went to that side and the women the other. There was nothing you could do about it. They were just not used to mixing.

*Q: Well, I think they would’ve been uncomfortable. I think that’s what they expected.*

KERR: You couldn’t fight it, so we accepted it.

*Q: So you just sat and chatted with the women about babies and servants and meals and dishes?*

KERR: We had about eight or nine servants, which was a bare minimum because you had to have a gardener, you had to have a watchman, you had to have a cook, and you had to have a dishwasher, you had to have a laundryman, you had to have someone for the children, and you had to have two bearers. One a head bearer, and one a second bearer, to serve. There was no out! I mean, eight or nine people was the bare minimum. And they all lived in the back in little hovels, really. And you paid them. I remember being shocked at being told you had to keep your food locked in the cupboard. You had to lock up your sugar. And I said, “Why?” “Because,” they said. “If you don’t lock it up, then people—

the servants—consider you don't care about it, and therefore they're free to help themselves. Which made sense. So, you understood why the Indian women always went around with keys tucked in their saris. Because everything is locked up, even in the Indian households.

*Q: Did you do that?*

KERR: I had to lock up the sugar and things.

*Q: Oh, you did?*

KERR: Yes. I had to. It was accepted. You learned a lot from the English who had been there longer and knew a lot.

*Q: Now, did you have an allowance to feed nine servants?*

KERR: No. You were given fifty dollars. We used to envy the English because they did have allowances for school and for food and so on. We didn't. We had a fifty dollar a month allowance for entertainment. You can imagine how many dinner parties you could serve on fifty dollars a month. But the people who were not first secretaries, the people below us, didn't get anything at all.

*Q: Well, what was the approximate cost of maintaining that and feeding that staff of nine in India in 1949-1950?*

KERR: I have no idea. I could look up my diaries. I kept a diary all these years, more for self-discipline than for—they're dull as anything to read, my word! I can't stand to read them over. But they do have some—I suppose I would have it in there.

*Q: It would be interesting to know that, because here you were on a first secretary salary, maintaining a staff of nine. No education allowance for children. No real entertainment allowance at all. Housing allowance, you must've had.*

KERR: Well, housing was provided.

*Q: And travel?*

KERR: No travel.

*Q: No travel in the country, they just paid to get you to India and brought you home.*

KERR: Mm-hmm. We got up to Kashmir, we got to Bengal, we got to a couple of other places. But with our children, you didn't travel much.

*Q: Uh-huh.*

KERR: I think we missed—the food was the biggest problem. The cook went to market every day and you ate Indian style, but you did miss things from home. I remember when we got home, being so glad to have cottage cheese and lettuce and orange juice.

*Q: How did the children manage?*

KERR: They hated powdered milk.

*Q: Uh-huh. That's when my children stopped drinking milk.*

KERR: Mine did pretty much, too. But other than that, they did—

*Q: They didn't mind the daily diet of Indian food?*

KERR: No. No.

*Q: Well, of course, it is good.*

KERR: I remember, though, in Tehran we were coming home on one of the P&O boats, and our youngest, who was then six or something, looking at the buffet on boat deck, said in a loud voice, "Look, ma! Rat cheese!" We'd had nothing but goat cheese for so long, rat cheese was just wonderful!

*Q: Tell me more about—you did some Burmese dancing too, I see. Japanese brush painting, Indian dancing, Burmese dancing—did you organize a group of women?*

KERR: Yes. In India, we tried to organize the Indian women to set up a refugee handicraft section, which they finally did, and they have a good museum now for handicrafts. I was trying to think what else we did. Oh, I was interested in whatever the Indian women were doing about birth control—and here was I, at that time, I was about eight months, and I could hear my husband saying, "Fine ad you are for birth control!" But Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was Health Minister then, and she said—you wouldn't believe—she said birth control was very easy in India. All you had to do at night was put

the women on one side of the river and the men on the other side. She actually said this, seriously! You couldn't believe it. That was fun.

*Q: And that was birth control in India!*

KERR: Yes!

*Q: In those days.*

KERR: Amazing.

*Q: Well, tell me more about the dancing. Did you just--?*

KERR: I have tapes of that. Early videotapes.

*Q: Early videotapes!*

KERR: It was fun. I loved Indian dancing. We did Japanese dancing, too, but that's fairly uninteresting after Indian dancing.

*Q: And you did Burmese too?*

KERR: Yes. That wasn't as interesting as the Indian. And Burmese food was certainly not as interesting.

*Q: So which of the posts did you really like the best?*

KERR: I think you always like your first post, don't you?

*Q: Yes.*

KERR: It's so new. I think we did enjoy India. Betty Lou Hummel would be so wonderful in Burma because they travelled a great deal. And then he went back, of course, to be marvelous as ambassador. And then when he was ambassador to China, I think he had the language too, as he'd been raised with a missionary father.

*Q: What did you do the two years that your husband was in Seoul and you were here alone?*

KERR: Well, the children were in high school. I worked at NIH then, I think, and I didn't

want to take them to Seoul because of schools. And I didn't want to leave them here alone, so it just seemed better to stay. Didn't you ever do that? Leave your kids?

*Q: No. We put them in boarding school when we were in Sierra Leone, and they were very young, I must admit. And after that, we were in Morocco—they were in Tangier three hours away. But we always tried to keep them in—*

KERR: With you?

*Q: Well, they weren't with us very much of the time really, but they were always in American schools and they were always not too far away, except for that one year—actually two years—they were in Switzerland when we were in West Africa. You just did it in those days. I wouldn't do it now, for anything in the world.*

KERR: No. We used to admire the British.

*Q: Well, see this was a former British colony and there were no British children there. Just the children of noncommissioned officers. And then the little military school that the children were going to first said they couldn't take them, so then we started looking for an alternative school in Switzerland. There was another school but it just—you didn't want your children to go to it really. So then they said they would have room to them, but by that time they had opened the doors to the children of the noncommissioned officers in the Sierra Leonian army, children who had—*

*End of interview*