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Foreign Service Spouse Series

**PENELOPE (PENNE) LAINGEN**

*Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi*  
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## INTERVIEW

Subject: The role of the spouse in the Foreign Service: The Iran Hostage Crisis

*Q: Penne filled two sides of two one-hour tapes. She talked from 10 o'clock until after 12, and I am hardly on the tape at all. She did most of the talking. She was articulate and emotional. I'd never met her before, and it was a charming experience for me, because she was the first person that I do not know who I interviewed.*

LAINGEN: A lot of women feel very strongly and they've had to be quiet, because of the new ways that are coming along in the Foreign Service. They are out -- they are retired -- yet they feel very strongly (about certain changes).

*Q: But that's when you can speak out...when your spouse has no career vulnerability.*

LAINGEN: (laughs) I'm waiting. This is premature.

*Q: Well, actually, if he's retiring next year, this (interview) won't go into print until after he's out of the Service, and we do guarantee everyone.*

LAINGEN: But the funny thing is that the older I get I don't really care. I mean, I do feel

wives can make a difference, but I don't think they can make or break their husbands' careers. If he's got it, he's got it. If he doesn't...it's too bad. You know, a lot of wives are much smarter than their husbands!

No, what I was going to say about Malta (where my husband was ambassador) was that we were the last family there, in a country that is 100% Catholic and very family-oriented. (We were succeeded by a woman ambassador without family and then a male ambassador who was divorced. I used to think that more care should be taken in the kind of representation we send to various countries, which would show a certain sensitivity to the host government and culture). We were a family (which was important to the Maltese), and even though it was in 1977 and I had, more or less, been told that I had been given my freedom -- I didn't have any responsibilities even though I was the ambassador's wife; they weren't my responsibilities, they were my husband's. You know, that was the attitude of the seventies -- I nevertheless went ahead with what I had to do and with what I was asked to do. But I didn't realize the seething anger that I was feeling, until finally FLO came along and they said there was some talk about rewriting the Directive. I think it came out of the Forum Report of 1977 where people were so unhappy with the Directive.

So, the ladies in the American community (in Malta) and I sat down and wrote a paper to FLO, and we felt, yes, the Directive should be rewritten to include those of us who really didn't have the freedom that others had (to do "our own thing"). Now, I notice in this paper of yours, here, which I thought was very interesting, where you say one lady talked to the Chargé's wife and you told her that she cannot take over the CLO position until the ambassador comes. In other words, an ambassador's wife is still locked out of having employment. Is that...

*Q: Apparently so. I don't have the CLO's Standard Operating Procedures, but as I recall I researched that before I put it in that letter and it did say that the wife of the Chief of Mission could not be CLO. And I tell you why. It would be conflict of interest, because she would be working for her husband.*

LAINGEN: Well, I know, but see how hypocritical that is -- the official policy -- in regard to ambassadors' wives particularly. And this is what really stuck in my craw, because if we're being told in 1972 that we're as free as anybody else to be our own person and this is being encouraged in society when you're at home, to get out and get your own job, your own financial base, the Cinderella Couple and all this, but you have been preparing for twenty years to take over this role of leadership and suddenly -- how can you be a leader when the troops have mutinied? There's nobody to lead and (there's no recognition that an ambassador's wife does not have the same options that others do). It's a very hypocritical situation.

I was sort of amused, in a way, by the incident recently when the (Canadian) Ambassador's wife slapped her social secretary. It was very interesting to me, because it recalled a time, going way back to my beginning in the Foreign Service. I mean, perhaps

that slap should have been placed on the jowls of the Ambassador or the visiting (Canadian) Prime Minister or even, symbolically speaking, on the System. Because the social secretary is paid to get it right, but the ambassador's wife, if something goes wrong, gets the blame. So, there's something wrong with that System, it seems to me.

But, anyway, it reminded me of when I was in Pakistan, which was really my most difficult post. I had never been overseas. We went with a two-year-old and I had a baby there and a miscarriage. I had every kind of parasite known to man. I was going to name my children after them, you know -- Amoebia-sis, Giardia -- I thought they were lovely names! (laughs)

*Q: Did you name them?*

LAINGEN: Noooo (laughs).

*Q: Of which they are eternally grateful (laughs).*

LAINGEN: And the servants were just rock bottom as far as training and cultural differences. It was the most difficult post! And I remember a particular day the electricity went off all over town and stayed off all day, so therefore the air-conditioning was out. Our kitchen was 120 degrees and it looked like the Black Hole of Calcutta, because it had a kerosene stove which I couldn't cook on and I didn't know how to and the walls were covered with soot. My sixth cook had quit that day when I asked him to rinse out some table napkins. He said "I don't do dhobi work" and he walked out. My two-year-old had five-inch worms coming out of his little bottom, which made me weak in the knees, my baby had a staph infection, which he had picked up in the hospital, great big sores all over him at three weeks old, I had a breast infection, so I didn't feel so hot, and the boss's wife had called me and reprimanded me for being late the day before to a party at the Residence and the toilet had backed up and was flowing into the front yard, (it was an absolute cess pool).

Well, it was just one thing after another, when my husband called from the air-conditioned Embassy and he informed me that he was bringing out Tish Baldrige that evening for dinner. She was there to set up a visit for Mrs. Kennedy. So, the First Lady's Social Secretary was coming and I didn't have a social secretary to turn around and slap. I wheeled around and kicked the kitchen cupboard until my foot went through it. (laughs). I was so chagrined at myself. Today, I wouldn't put up with that. I would have told my husband: "Sorry, dear." But in those days, we didn't, did we? We took it all on ourselves. We thought possibly there was something wrong with us that we couldn't cope.

*Q: We swallowed it.*

LAINGEN: We swallowed it. We were the good little girls, yes. And I really think Pakistan was where I came closest to a nervous breakdown. When I finally flew home with the two boys, all by myself, halfway around the world, which is something I would

never be able to do again, I remember my mother saying: "You're so hard. What's happened to you? You've changed."

And the other thing which was difficult in Pakistan was that Bruce and I had been introduced by an ambassador who was a neighbor in Chevy Chase, and it turned out that he was the ambassador in Pakistan. Evidently, he had asked for us to come out there. He was delightful to us. His wife, I realized, was in a difficult position. It was her first time as an ambassador's wife. But she was playing a role (and wanted it made clear to me that she would not play favorites).

We arrived, we arrived the first night in Pakistan and had to go immediately to the Political Counselor's house for dinner. We had this little two-year-old, as I said, and he was really out of sorts, but in typical Foreign Service fashion -- Thank goodness, our air freight had come, so I had this folding crib -- we put it on the top of the car and drove to the Political Counselor's house with this baby, bedded him down there while I went to this dinner party. It was madness. Absolutely, madness. (But that's the way things were done in those days).

Then we were invited to the Residence for cocktails, and when I walked in, the ambassador was very sweet -- "How are you? Nice to see you again?" and gave me a big kiss -- but the wife -- the hand was out, sort of like "kiss my hand, (I am royalty here)", and I knew that that was the way it was going to be between us -- had to be all very proper. That was very, very difficult, and I had people say to me, we know that you're personal friends of them, but we've decided that we'd judge you for yourself and not for them. I mean, it was very, very awkward.

*Q: Was that your first post?*

LAINGEN: That was my first post. And in fear and trembling of dropping the right card, that sort of thing. No, it was pure hell, absolute hell. There were high points, I would say, our child being born, Mrs. Kennedy's visit, and traveling up north, but it was four years of torture, a very, very difficult post.

*Q: Do you want to elaborate on Mrs. Kennedy's visit? Because I sometimes wonder if the outside world realizes what an embassy or a consulate goes through when they have a CODEL or a Vice Presidential visit or a Secretary of State visit.*

LAINGEN: Well, I certainly have many stories about that, too!

*Q: Fine! We have all morning. (laughs).*

LAINGEN: I've often thought I, you know, after the assassination of Jack Kennedy and the way Mrs. Kennedy positioned herself then, performed (and I do think it was a performance, a beautiful performance), I felt very remorseful about the way I felt about her.

*Q: In Pakistan?*

LAINGEN: In Pakistan. She did carry it off. She was a lovely-looking woman. I wouldn't say she had queenly appeal. She followed to Pakistan two queens -- Queen Elizabeth and Queen Sirikit, two truly queenly women -- troopers. Jackie Kennedy had more of a movie-star appeal to the Pakistanis. She was fascinating. Actually, my husband was the one with Tish Baldrige and his boss who set up the visit.

*Q: He was Control Officer?*

LAINGEN: Yes, and they would set up a program to go visit this mosque or a dinner party or something and the form would come back saying "she won't do this, she won't shake hands, she won't give gifts, she wants to take a nap at such and such a time." And then, they would send another program -- it went on like that for months. And I remember the ambassador saying, "well, if she's a basket case, why doesn't she stay home?" It was interesting, because he was quickly retired from that post. I don't know if it was because of that. At any rate, the new ambassador came and presented his credentials on a Tuesday and Mrs. Kennedy arrived on Wednesday, so he didn't know anyone and had to really rely on my husband and David Linebaugh, the Political Counselor, to introduce him to people.

And what was so difficult was that Mrs. Kennedy was late to everything. I don't mean fifteen minutes late, I mean two hours late! There was no conception of the thousands of people lining the streets (in a dust storm) waiting for one glimpse of her. One little newswoman said to me: "I'm very perplexed about your Mrs. Kennedy. She seems to be an enigma. They say that she is a student of history and she loves art, and yet she is not going to see the Red Fort in Lahore, but is bypassing it and is only interested in the Horse Show.

So, it was terribly interesting, the whole state visit. And yet with all the problems, of being late and the small details -- her bobby pins, her frozen daiquiris, whatever it was she wanted -- the impact that she had -- it came off. I can still remember to this day the beautiful lemon brocade dress that she wore at the Shalimar Gardens. She was presented with a silver replica of the Shalimar Gardens, and it was the first time she had opened her mouth. No one had heard her speak and out came this little Marilyn Monroe, sort of whispery voice, and the women were looking around at each other thinking: "Oh, my goodness, this is just beyond us, how drippy."

But the men were totally fascinated, totally mesmerized (laughs) and, of course, this was just perfect. So, we said, all right. She has made the -- she has skimmed the surface and done right.

She has taken -- she wanted a private visit, but she has made it into a semi-state visit, and that's fine. It went off. But looking back now, I think she was young, she had young children, she was having miscarriages herself, her husband -- now that we know, was

fooling around -- so I kind of admire her now, you know? She did present a certain charisma, they had charisma, they carried it off, and America was at its peak. And so, I'm not so critical, I guess, as I was then.

*Q: We mellow with age, right?*

LAINGEN: We really do. I think that's quite true.

*Q: We become more understanding. I agree with you. I can understand perfectly how Mrs. Gotlieb felt the other night. However, she should have thrown bricks or kicked the kitchen cupboard, as you did, I guess.*

LAINGEN: Yes, that's right. Poor thing. (laughs).

*Q: Or kicked the press corps -- no, not that. (laughs). Just for the record, where else did you serve? Malta?*

LAINGEN: Bruce is older than I, so he had been in Hamburg, Germany, and in Iran (before we met). He came back to the States when we met, and he was on the Greek Desk, and then we went four years to Pakistan. We came home again. We've always had a post in between, at home, which has been wonderful, but I don't have a long list of countries as a result to say we've been in. Then we went three years to Afghanistan, where Bruce was Deputy Chief of Mission, back home again for six years, including one year at the National War College, and then as Ambassador to Malta. Then, before Bruce came home, he was head of the CSCE Conference in Malta in January 1979.

When he came home, he was going into the Inspection Corps and was within one week of going to South America when he was called to see if he would go to Iran -- just for four to six weeks -- to substitute for Charlie Naas, who had been in the first takeover of the Embassy in February 1979 and who was really in desperate need to get out. So, Bruce just went to tide him over until they decided whether they would have an ambassador there. He (Bruce) did such a good job, morale wise, that in the middle of the summer, they (the State Department) called and asked if he would stay and be ambassador to Iran. Bruce said, well, "I can't make a decision that way. I have to ask my family" and he said, "I'm coming home on consultation in September and then we'll talk it over." Well, by the time he got home, they were having second thoughts about the relationship with Iran (so decided to have him return as Chargé on a temporary basis).

I remember his saying to me, something about the Shah coming into this country, and I said, "Now, wait a minute. You went over there (under the proviso or) I thought they were not going to bring the Shah into this country." He said, "It's not a matter of 'if', but it's a matter of 'when'." So, when he went back, he knew very well that he would be in trouble. In fact, he wrote a memo to that effect that if the Shah comes into the U.S., we will have a hostage situation on our hands. I remember that last day before he left, we



went to a wedding. He didn't want to go to the reception and I insisted because they were very close friends. But he was totally preoccupied and I knew that he knew what he was going back to face. I look back on that with horror.

But then, he was going to come home by Halloween, then at Thanksgiving, and then, of course, he was taken hostage.

*Q: I think on the fourth of November -- my husband's birthday.*

LAINGEN: Oh? (laughs) And Election Day.

*Q: So, you were not in Iran? You were here.*

LAINGEN: No, (the families were not allowed to be in Iran at that time. They had been evacuated in December 1978. Only working couples were allowed to be there, like the Staffords and Lijeks, who were brought out by the Canadians in February, 1980). But I had traveled to Iran from Afghanistan, and it's a funny thing, I never liked Iran. Bruce adored it. He loved it. And he always said, "You are being unfair, you never lived there and you don't know the people." But I said, "I see it through the eyes of a white, infidel Christian woman."

*Q: I'm fascinated with what you're saying, because many of your reactions were exactly what mine were.*

LAINGEN: It's funny. We loved Afghanistan even so, as a woman there. I mean, I would come in the gate perhaps with my arms full of groceries, and the servants would practically knock me over to grab my husband's briefcase. He was the Burra Sahib, (Big Man), you see. But, in Iran, I was afraid. This is what I saw.

When we went to Meshed, which is the Holy City, where Bruce had been Consul eighteen years before, he wanted to go back -- it's a lovely interesting town -- we wanted to go into the mosque. I was perfectly amenable to cultural differences. I had taken my shoes off many places. In fact, I was wearing a chalwar chemise. I was very conservatively dressed. But, at any rate, we went into a tourist center and they threw the dirtiest, filthiest, greasiest chador at me and said: "You wear this!" It was belligerent, I could tell it. They hated me for standing there with my white, Christian infidel face hanging out, you see? (laughs) And I said, no. I'm not going to wear that dirty rag.

So, I went into a little material shop and I sat very quietly in a window(seat) there. The women would come in with these black chadors and I could see these beady eyes looking me up and down. And presently, a policeman came in and in perfect English he said to me, very harshly: "What do you want? What are you doing here?" I had obviously upset them tremendously. And I said "nothing, nothing, I'm waiting for my husband." I put my head down rather demurely in trying, best I could (to be inconspicuous), but there was a terrible intolerance.

*Q: What year was this?*

LAINGEN: This was probably 1969 or 1970...

*Q: Oh, so this is quite a bit before your husband went back a second time.*

LAINGEN: This was the second time we went back to Iran. The third time was when he became a hostage. He had been posted (in Meshed and Teheran) from 1953 to 1955, before we met. Then, this was a trip, the second time. The third time, he went as a hostage.

*Q: He went as a hostage?*

LAINGEN: (laughs) He went as a Chargé and came out a hostage!

So, my experience in Iran was that, wherever we went, even in Teheran where a lot of women had been wearing French clothes. I still felt the prejudice against us. Maybe it was as Americans, but I felt it was as a woman or as a Christian woman. There was a tremendous air of intolerance. Funny thing is, I didn't feel that in Afghanistan. Now, perhaps the difference was that the Afghans are Sunni Moslems and the Iranians are Shiites. I don't know what the reason is, but you see, Bruce never felt that (prejudice) in Iran, and I don't think a man would recognize it.

*Q: Because it didn't apply to him.*

LAINGEN: It didn't apply to him at all. And if you are treated like a big sahib, you're not going to care what your wife is being treated as! (laughs)

*Q: Can I ask you how you lived those 444 days?*

LAINGEN: I was just thinking yesterday about that time in Pakistan that I told you about -- the tremendous stress and the coming close to a nervous breakdown in Pakistan -- almost made those 444 days a piece of cake. Frankly, no it wasn't, but how did I spend it? Well, I mainly spent it -- you couldn't think about anything else. Let's face it. In my whole history of being connected to the Foreign Service, whenever I'd started a project, for instance -- I am a writer and I had three chapters written in a novel and my teacher said "You have a real winner here and should get an agent now" -- then, Bruce was taken hostage, so I put that away and I've not gotten back to it. I will someday, I hope. I had also upholstered a chair and I had everything but the back done when we went to Malta, (so I had to put that away, too). I mean, it's just been a history of deferring or putting aside something. So when he was taken hostage, I just had to put everything else out of my mind and concentrate on that. I also called all my training in the Foreign Service to bear, even though I felt I had been "dismissed" by the Foreign Service.

*Q: Oh, you...now I'm interested in that...*

LAINGEN: I mean that -- you talk about Mrs. Matthews feeling this -- I really felt 1972 (when the Policy Directive on spouses was issued) very strongly -- that we were "dismissed."

*Q: Cast adrift.*

LAINGEN: Cast adrift. This is another thing I don't think my husband understands to this day. "But, honey, haven't you enjoyed the Foreign Service?" Well, yes, there are high points, but I think it was the total identity that I had been led to believe I was a part of it -- and a vital part of it -- and it gnawed on me all through Malta. I did it (carried out the role), but it still gnawed, terribly -- the lack of recognition that I was out there doing a job for the U.S. Government. That's the way I really felt about it.

So, here we come to the hostage crisis, a terribly public, international crisis, where you are on television. I think most people recognize and say, okay, this is the wife of the Chief of Mission (and how she behaves reflects not only on her husband, but perhaps on the whole Foreign Service or on Americans on the world scene). If I had gone on television and cried nightly, if I'd flown off to Iran and called the President stupid or the Government's policy stupid, I think I would have heard in two minutes just how private a person I was! (I would have been reprimanded by the very Department of State which had proclaimed me to be a private person with no responsibility to my husband's career). I mean, I'm being sarcastic and I realized I wasn't a private person. You can't be a private person. You are a part of the Foreign Service and particularly when you are on the public stage like that. It's a public life. How can you be a private person in a public life? See, this is what Sandra Gotlieb found out. You cannot be a private person in a public arena. There's no way.

So, the hypocrisy of this official policy has just gnawed no end at me. And I got no support from the Department in that role. I got sort of superficial support. Well, not even that, not even that.

*Q: Did you call weekly, daily, hourly to find out?*

LAINGEN: No, no.

*Q: Did you wait for them?*

LAINGEN: Well, I started -- I went down to the Department, I will say that. They opened up this Task Force Center and you could go up there. But after awhile, you felt in the way. They were not giving you any jobs to do.

But along about March of 1980, five months after the takeover, I went to lunch over at Annapolis with some (former) POW's wives and they had been very supportive. One of

them was Alice Stratton, and she is now head of the Navy Family Office or whatever. She said you need to get organized -- the families need to get organized. I said, yes, I really feel that's something that I have been feeling I'm not getting any support from the Department, but the families have all these questions -- legal, financial, repatriational, (medical, administrative), whatever -- they aren't getting the answers. The one thing that was coming up was should we pay our income taxes? We just weren't getting the answers.

Anyway, I called the families together in March of 1980 and we founded FLAG right then and there, formed the family group, the Family Liaison Action Group. In the meantime, I had been working on the yellow ribbon campaign. That started because a Washington Post lady (Barbara Parker) called me and said, "You seem so calm." And she said we noticed that the psychiatrists are saying that their mental patients are so angry at Iran that they've coined this phrase "Irage" that they're seeing it in their patients. And she said they are wondering how you manage.

*(Break in tape)*

We were talking how the yellow ribbon got started because the Washington Post woman called me and asked "how do you stay calm". So we talked about religion and the support I was getting from family. At that time, we had a son at Annapolis and I had former POW wives supporting me. So, then I said, the one thing that bothers me is the kind of demonstrations that are going on. At that time, there were some college students throwing dog food at Iranian demonstrators in our streets. They were showing signs of this Irage. I said that just wouldn't help our situation. "Tell them to do something constructive, because we need a great deal of patience. Just tell them to tie a yellow ribbon around the old oak tree." I don't know why it came to me, except that I had put a yellow ribbon up myself on a large oak in my yard. And she said, "Have you done this?" And I said, "yes." She lived in Reston, Virginia, and she said "I think it's a wonderful thing," so she started hanging ribbons in Reston. One night, it was snowing and my doorbell rang. I went to the door and there was a woman there, who turned out to be an AID wife. And there was her station wagon with the children and the dog hanging out of it, and she said "I have just come to tell you that I have appointed myself Chairman of the Yellow Ribbon Committee -- my sister and I." (They were Gail Carlson and Karen Helfert). And so, those two started hanging ribbons all over Washington, DC, up Massachusetts Avenue and around the White House.

Then eventually, I was asked to the White House to hang a yellow ribbon on a Georgia Maple, so I went with Mrs. Carter and did that. Then, I was asked up to Capitol Hill to put a yellow ribbon around the Sam Rayburn Oak tree (the night of the State of the Union Address). And then, I went to Wye Oak, Maryland, where the largest oak tree in the United States is located, with Governor Harry Hughes. It was so large that instead of a ribbon, we had a bolt of yellow (cloth) and he went around one side of the tree and I went around the other (laughs), and we swathed this giant tree with yellow.

Well, it did just snowball. And then, No Greater Love (a humanitarian organization under the direction of Carmela LaSpada) went to the unions and they produced this pin. We began giving those out all over the United States. Then, we worked with Girl Scouts (and Boy Scouts), veterans, and various Junior Chambers of Commerce, and it became a national (symbol). I think Dotty Morefield was putting up billboards in California. (laughs) And bumper stickers. And it just spread.

There was one thing that interested me about the American people. They do love their gimmicks, and we had to be very careful of those people who began exploiting our situation to make money off of our trauma. There was one woman I remember particularly in North Carolina, I think, who began putting out bulletins to people and selling them or selling bumper stickers and T-shirts and things like that, but I think I have always been amazed at the way that the hostage situation took hold of the American people's imagination. I just think the time was ripe after Vietnam and Watergate. We were feeling very down about ourselves. If you recall, Jimmy Carter was going up to Camp David into the mountains, calling all these people in and saying, "What's the matter with the United States?" At the time the takeover took place (in Iran), he was in fact at Camp David doing that very thing. There was a tremendous amount of being down about ourselves as Americans. I think with the Iran crisis, people began to say, "No more, this is it."

*Q: We bottomed out with the Iran crisis.*

LAINGEN: Who are they to treat us this way? We were over there to try to establish a new relationship with the revolutionary government of Iran. In fact, I have a letter from my husband to that effect. But it was too late. Our relationship with the Shah was so deep. After all, thirty years of supporting him and they (the mullahs) weren't trusting of us at all. And when we did bring the Shah into this country, they thought we were going to get him well and send him back. So we could understand that.

At any rate, I think that's one reason why the yellow ribbon really took off, because people were feeling the need to be united about something at last and feel good about themselves. We were really a good people and we didn't mean bad by the Iranians. And it was such a ludicrous situation, holding diplomats hostage like that, even though there had been a precedent in 1949 in Mukden, China.

*Q: I didn't know that...*

LAINGEN: There were Americans held for thirteen months. I've met one of the women, Mary Hubbard, a Foreign Service officer actually, and she later married one of the fellows that she was held captive with. And you never heard of that situation. That's why I feel the Iran thing just happened at a time of history when we were ripe for that. At any rate, the yellow ribbon -- and then I felt through my experience as an ambassador's wife and then having served under ambassadors' wives who took their jobs, in quotes, seriously, that my training meant that I had a certain responsibility for the families of the hostages -- just as

Bruce was feeling for his colleagues in Iran. I felt a responsibility there. I had not necessarily one to the U.S. Government (with its official policy of not caring what I did), but probably...

*Q: In human terms...*

LAINGEN: Yes, but mostly to my husband, that I had to behave. But also, I just felt a responsibility and that's why this family organization came about. I felt it just had to be done. We had to have input into decisions that were being made (for us and for the hostages). It wasn't that we were going against the Government (and the military services were very concerned about that when we organized FLAG), but we had to have that option if we wanted to. (That independence, at one point, became obvious when the terrorists said they might release the hostages into the custody of the families, not to the United States Government).

*Q: I've always wondered if they notified you that they were going to make that rescue attempt. Did you know about that?*

LAINGEN: Well, that's interesting, because I had been told by someone, who will remain forever a secret...

*Q: ...a secret, yes...*

LAINGEN: Because those were things that were discussed in National Security Council meetings, and no one was supposed to know. This fellow, however, wanted me to pressure the Government to do it (the raid). He had heard and he had been in Iran and said it was quite possible. He showed me a map. He said this was where we could land (in the desert), we could fly into Teheran and gas everybody in sight, including the hostages. I was in such a daze, I kind of listened superficially to him, but I said "well, I don't feel that that is my business", (yet I wanted to believe it was possible). Interestingly, with three children in the Navy and kind of an idealistic attitude about America, I felt we could do anything if we really put our mind to it. At any rate, the families -- at one of our meetings -- they sensed that something was afoot.

We had run through everything, including Kurt Waldheim's trip to Iran, which had fallen through, and Ham Jordan dressing up with a red wig and speaking to lawyers in Paris and some idiotic things. And everything had failed. And so, we just felt something was afoot. The American people were getting antsy. I remember one family member saying that she wanted to talk to Brzezinski. I said it seemed to me that Lloyd Cutler was probably closer to the President and maybe more sensible. So, I called David Newsom (the Under Secretary of State) in the Department, and I said the families are really worried that something is going to be done militarily and they want to talk to Brzezinski or Lloyd Cutler. He said, "Before you do that, let me talk to them." So, we set up a night meeting, I remember, at the State Department. In the meantime, one of the mothers had flown off to Iran and four of the wives had gone to Europe. (Newsom) passed a circular around at that

meeting which said that the rest of us could not go anywhere.

*Q: These people just went off on their own without telling anyone.*

LAINGEN: Yes, right. Well, I don't know about the four that went to Europe to talk with Heads of State. No, I've never been sure about, that visit. Perhaps Jimmy Carter set it up himself, thinking that, you know, he would make it (look like) the idea of the family members -- that they were doing it. But I think there was Government support there, because I tried to get to the bottom of it, who financed that visit, and I never have (found out). I was very angry because we had set up FLAG (to act independently of Government and I was a founding Board member, but kept in the dark about a lot of things). And supposedly, they went under the auspices of FLAG, but suddenly (so it wouldn't look like the Government was behind it), we were strapped with an \$8000 bill and not told where the money was coming from.

*Q: They presented you with the bill?*

LAINGEN: Yes, these women -- and particularly one, who did everything by fait accompli -- and she will remain nameless -- but that was the way FLAG was beginning to be run, which was not to my liking at all. At any rate, there were these five (the one in Iran and the four in Europe) who were not at this meeting. I remember saying out myself that I really resented particularly the one going to Iran, because, I said, that if we had wanted a spokesperson from the families to go to Iran, she would not have been the one to be chosen. I thought she might do our cause a great deal of damage. There were other people involved -- fifty two others -- besides her son. I remember one of the young teenagers in another family saying: "And I resent your resentment." Well, it turned out that his mother had already bought her ticket to go to Iran! (laughs) And I didn't know that.

David Newsom said "Nothing is going to happen, nothing is going to happen, I assure you. We are keeping the hostages first in our minds and we will do nothing to endanger their lives."

So everyone left the meeting feeling very good and calm. At one or two o'clock in the morning, the phone rang and it was Henry Precht. He said, "First of all, Bruce is all right, I'll tell you that. Secondly, there was a rescue mission and it was aborted and eight commandos have been killed." The interesting thing is, because I had had some background of this (concerning a possible raid) from this other person, I wasn't shocked. I wasn't surprised. I was really feeling, well, my goodness, what to think about David Newsom? Either he didn't know about the raid or it was the biggest ruse anyone had ever pulled on the families. So, I fell right back to sleep after (Henry and I) hung up. The next thing I knew it was about five o'clock in the morning and the media people were banging on the door, just banging on the door, and it woke me up with a start -- and my son. But we hid out and didn't turn on any lights and waited until they had left. About 7:30, I went to church, because I was feeling not only sad about the eight that had been killed, but I

felt sorry for Jimmy Carter. I thought what a terrible decision he had had to make, that he was that desperate and then it failed. (I also wondered why there had been so much effort the night before to keep the rest of us from flying off to Iran. Was the woman who went there going to be gassed along with everyone else and put on the helicopters? Had she been allowed to go to throw everyone off about the raid?)

I have a funny story to add to that, because Bruce's brother, Arvid, who is still in Minnesota on the farm -- He became something of a folk hero out there and is still very Norwegian in his whole outlook and speech -- had to be called and informed about the raid. I had been told by the State Department -- don't comment to the press about the rescue mission. So, I called Arvid out there and said, "Don't say anything if the media calls you. You just don't have any comments." He said, in his Norwegian accent, "Tew lett. The helicopter from Minneapolis landed in the fields. They cem tew interview me about the aborted rescew mission." And I said, "Ohhhh, Arvid, what did you say?" And he said: "Well, I said if President Carter had succeeded, he woood be a heeroo." (laughs) I said, "Well, that's fine. You said the right thing." He is just such a character.

Anyway, I came home (from church) and I felt at peace, because Bruce was all right. I called the White House (I had a contact there), and I said, "I just want President Carter to know how badly I feel for him, that I support him, and it's a shame it failed, but if you can possibly hit 'em again, hit 'em harder, that sort of thing." At any rate, the next day, which was Sunday or Monday, I believe, I had friends come down from New York. They said, "Oh, we saw your telegram in the New York Times, the telegram you sent to the President." And I said: "The what?" "Yes," they said, "it said that you supported the rescue mission, hit 'em again, don't despair." That was the time when I was really angry with President Carter, because I had wanted just a private message to him, that I knew how badly he must feel, I had prayed over it, and then he -- needing desperately some support (from the families) for it, let my message go to the New York Times without asking me at all. (This put me in a difficult position with the other hostage families). It wasn't that I went against President Carter, but I just really wasn't as happy with him after that. And then...

*Q: Do you think it was his decision or somebody else's?*

LAINGEN: It could have been somebody else's.

*Q: But still, he let it go through. He was a man who paid attention to detail. He knew that it was going through...*

LAINGEN: Yes. Right. And then, Mary McGrory called me. At that time, they were saying that the rescue mission was a political maneuver. Did I think that Carter had done it in order to win the election? He was beginning to campaign and beginning to see that his Rose Garden policy of staying close to the White House and doing nothing but hostages was hurting him.



I said I refused to make any comments that way. The only thing I will say is that, anybody who turns this tremendous American surge of patriotism or whatever it is we are feeling into a political gimmick, makes a big mistake, I think. I don't see how anybody could win an election if he does that. They've got to stay above politics where this Iran thing is concerned.

Anyway, it's sad, because it did turn out to be his (Carter) undoing. Most people, as they pointed out today with Reagan in Grenada and Reagan in Libya, that the American people do support their Presidents in quick little wars, but they certainly didn't with Carter in Iran. It turned against him very much. It killed him. At any rate, the more I thought about the rescue mission, too, I realized -- after it failed -- that America was not as capable as I thought we were. (A raid into that populous area was impossible and, no doubt, many would have been killed, even some of the hostages. When Secretary Vance resigned in protest, I became very skeptical about the raid). I mean, what in the world were these helicopters failing for in the desert? And I felt particularly bad, because, as I say, I had one son at the Naval Academy and another one at the University of Minnesota in NROTC and a third one coming along who is now at Annapolis, all of them wanting to fly. Our middle son now is a helicopter pilot, and I -- you know -- he recently took off from an aircraft carrier and the plane burst into flames and he had to quickly get back on the aircraft carrier. He almost dunked in the ocean! There's so much talk about missiles, spending money on missile weapons, when the things we really need in warfare are falling apart. These helicopters are so old that it was very disillusioning to me. The more I thought about it, too, I thought how are they going to rescue my husband at the Foreign Ministry?

*Q: That would have been my thought.*

LAINGEN: You know, somebody said they were going to scale the wall. I have a funny story to tell about that because I was very lucky, I could get mail through to Bruce, and at one point I encouraged the families to put yellow ribbons in their letters (to the hostages). But they said, Oh, but our husbands don't receive any mail. And I said "But the militants do, and they will open these letters and the yellow ribbons will fall out. It will have an impact and they will say, 'what does this mean?'" The Iranians are a very devious people and they see plots in everything. And this is exactly what happened, because Richard Queen told us when he came home that he did get the yellow ribbon. But they all (the guards) said: "What does this mean?" Richard said, "It's not a plot. It just meant they haven't forgotten me. We are waiting patiently for you." But they (the guards) never really believed it.

Well, Bruce received his ribbon and pasted it up on the window. One day, the guard from down below (in the courtyard) at the Foreign Ministry saw the ribbon and came rushing into the room. "What is this? You've got to take it down!" He thought it was a signal to the commandos that this was the room (in which the hostages were held). Even the guards in Iran knew something was going to happen. They were beginning to get very antsy, of course, thinking rightly that a raid was an impossible task. (But after the raid occurred,

even though it failed), they were beginning to get frightened.

And then he (Bruce) tells the story that a few months later, again, a guard came rushing into the room. He had seen something on the window. It was bird doo. And Bruce said "I'll be darned if I'll wash that window!" But they were that skitterish about things. They thought there were plots in everything and that we were very clever.

The more I thought about the rescue mission, I thanked the good Lord that it really didn't succeed. I was always, publicly, even when Bruce got home, we never said anything against it, because we marveled at the fact there were other Americans willing to put their lives on the line to save their fellow Americans. So that has always been something we don't want to shatter, (to give the impression) that those men went on a mission that was stupid. We certainly didn't want to say that to their families. But I do look back on it and think it was an act of desperation. We had been through everything we possibly could and then, in April, this mission failed. After that, the whole summer through 1980, there was nothing -- nothing, absolutely nothing going on.

*Q: No initiations...negotiations?*

LAINGEN: Nothing, they had turned over every stone possible, and also the families were beginning to feel that perhaps we ought to be quiet and just wait until the Iranians saw that nothing was happening and they'd get tired of it, tired of all the publicity. Perhaps too much publicity had lengthened the hostage crisis. So then, we tried to calm everybody down, and that didn't work. By then, the American people had really been stirred up too much. (laughs) (That summer, too, Richard Queen returned because he had developed Multiple Sclerosis. The family members took that to mean that their loved ones were probably in pretty good health. Also, that the Iranians had no intention of killing any of them. It then became a matter of waiting for the Iranians to figure out a way to release the hostages without losing "face". They had made their points about their grievances. The Shah died that July, so they knew he wouldn't return. And they'd just about squeezed every value out of the hostage issue to unite their people behind the new revolutionary government or Majlis).

I think what really completed the hostage crisis was the Iran-Iraq War, where Iran had used the hostages to put their Government together with the mullahs, the clericals. So then, they had served that purpose and now they (the Iranians) were distracted by the war. Also, I remember that the Iranian banker, Nobari, who was in Paris, finally saw that the freezing of the assets was killing Iran and he went to tell Ghotbzadeh and some of them -- and Bani Sadr, who knew economics -- that the hostage crisis was now beginning to turn against them. (One of them came to the United Nations and saw how isolated Iran had become on the world scene when they received no support concerning the invasion of the Iraqis). And then, I think the prospect of Ronald Reagan coming in also had something to do with ending it.

*Q: It seemed to me it gave them an opportunity with Carter out and Reagan coming in, it*

*was an opportunity that they seized. Now, whether we planted the thought with them or someone there thought it up themselves...*

LAINGEN: Well, I do think that's true, but I also think that they panicked, because the last few days before the Inauguration, when all the business with the Algerians was going on and

Warren Christopher (was) flying back and forth, the feeling was that the day of the Inauguration was the deadline, and if they didn't come through and agree on it and they didn't get what they wanted from the Americans, then Reagan -- who knows what Reagan would do -- bomb Kharg Island or do something? -- that was his reputation then. So that was definitely the deadline for them. They had to get that done.

But it's interesting that weeks before that, they did come and get Bruce and the others out of the Foreign Ministry, held a gun to their heads (a lot of people don't know this) and those three were in solitary confinement in prison for three weeks. And no beds there. They slept on cement floors, their teeth chattering. It was just awful. I was informed that Bruce had gone from the Foreign Ministry. They didn't know where. And I remember Sheldon Krys saying he hoped that I would not worry too much. I said, "No, as a matter of fact, I felt it was the beginning of the end. Bruce might be in prison and it might be awful, but there was something moving. It's movement, and I think it's a step out." And that's exactly what happened. So...

*Q: Was Sheldon Krys in on those negotiations?*

LAINGEN: Oh, yes, I'm sure he was. (Perhaps not the monetary negotiations, but certainly involved with the hostages' release).

*Q: He came as Ambassador to Trinidad just as we were leaving. I had one afternoon briefing session with him and saw him a few times afterwards. Very competent.*

LAINGEN: Very competent.

(One thing that made it difficult was the lack of esprit de corps among the families. I mean, we had never served together, so that was one of the drawbacks. And there were all different services involved. There's a study done of fourteen hostage wives. Those of us who had served the longest in the Foreign Service expected the most, yet felt we had received the least support. Those foreign-born spouses in the group expected nothing and were deeply grateful for whatever they received in the way of support. They had no great expectations of the Department, which was perhaps a cultural difference. And the military wives felt they received the greatest support, which they did, and in return kept their allegiance to those services in tact. I believe Sheldon Krys and other Department managers did the best they could under the circumstances, but they had much to learn from the Iran crisis in the management of families during a crisis. It was always a source of great disappointment to me, for instance, that not once during the crisis did any of my

husband's colleagues offer to take our youngest son to a basketball game or call to inquire about the house or other personal matters. It was up to us unite ourselves and support one another in that personal way.

I suppose at posts overseas, when crisis strikes, Foreign Service personnel exhibit more esprit de corps and community cohesion than was evident to us here in Washington. Several of us wrote a report for the State Department with suggestions on methods of handling families in crisis, and

I am happy to say, that crisis managers are beginning to include family members in the terrorism equation. At least, now, they are seen as "indirect victims" and that their reactions are not mental problems, but human reactions to stress. I am working with NOVA now in regard to the families of the hostages in Lebanon and have contributed to a video tape for the Overseas Briefing Center which will be disseminated to our posts abroad.

*Q: Do you have all of this in writing anywhere?*

LAINGEN: Well, I did keep a diary. It is interesting to look back at it, because I was so angry. Anger is a part of the cycles that you go through and, of course, we went through the cycles many times, because it was an open-ended grief. If our husbands had died -- you would go through the cycles and that would be the end. You'd end up with acceptance. But it just went up and down for 444 days -- despair, depression...

*Q: ...an erratic stock market.*

LAINGEN: And I see it now with these hostage families (in Lebanon) -- the same thing. You knew you were angry, but there wasn't much you could do. You tried to focus your anger. Many of them (the families) focused it on the State Department. That was another thing I told them (the crisis managers) that "you mustn't take it personally, because anger is very natural. They're going to have to find someplace to put their anger and it probably will be focused on you (the managers)."

But what we did, in our family, was put up a dart board of Khomeini and threw darts at it in our house. That kind of thing helped get it out. I saw in my diary, looking back in it, you could see the anger. We didn't call them Shiites, for instance. (laughs).

*Q: (laughs) I can imagine.*

LAINGEN: And I'm really sort of sad, because the letters that I wrote to Bruce show that anger. If I'd had my eye on history or something, but I just was constantly pouring it out...

*Q: Oh, no, I think it probably was natural to let the anger come out. Would you be willing to let the history center look at that diary?*

LAINGEN: (laughs) Nooo way.

*Q: No way? Would you be willing to edit it?*

LAINGEN: Well, that's what I want to do, to write a book from it. That's in the future. Why I have put it off so long, I don't know, except I think the homecoming and the getting back to normal has been amazingly long and very difficult..

*Q: I was going to ask you if there had been any change in your pre-Iran attitude and post-hostage period.*

LAINGEN: Well, yes, of course. I had become much more independent and mentally retired from the Foreign Service. A long separation like that usually means that nothing will ever be the same again, and it takes a great deal of commitment to the marriage and love on the part of everyone in the family to adjust. I had never liked Iran, as I told you, and I'm afraid that the hostage crisis did nothing to better my estimation of the country. Bruce has been much more forgiving than I.

The thing that surprised me most was how the anger remained for such a long time afterward. I thought it would disappear once the hostages were home. I finally came to the conclusion that the anger stemmed from the whole upsetting trauma in our lives, not from anyone or anything specifically. What they did in Iran was wrong, and there's no two ways about it, and if they haven't learned that lesson, it's too bad for all of us. With the continuing incidents of terrorism, it seems they haven't, and they are still taking hostages in Beirut. But sources tell me that Iranians are suffering greatly today and, although the revolutionary fervor is beginning to subside, it is about 10% of the hard-lined fundamentalists who continue to run the country.

There's so much we need to know about the families, how they react, how they cope.

*Q: You must have had a feeling that you had to keep this alive. You had to keep it alive with the Department. With the Administration. With the public and how best to do this.*

LAINGEN: Well, yes and no. I don't think we thought much about that actually, because I think all of us felt the injustice of the whole thing. I think the American people felt that right from the beginning, so we didn't need to keep it alive.

*Q: You really thought you had public support. See, I wasn't aware of that.*

LAINGEN: I don't think we had to, no I don't think so. Now this group of family members (in Lebanon) don't have that attention. It's really awful, because the captors don't seem to crave the publicity themselves, the militants, the terrorists. They have made one plea (demand) to get the terrorists in Kuwait released, and that's it. Take it or leave it, they say. They're not trying to use the hostages to form a government and have their people rally around them.

*Q: Of course, it's pretty scary...*

LAINGEN: It's very much scarier, particularly if they've murdered one, which they think they have. This Buckley. I expect they'd stop at nothing. What's to keep them -- if they, for instance, this thing with Qadhafi -- it's very scary for them, because the terrorists could pop these off and take new hostages as a protest against the raid on Libya.

*Q: How did you feel about this Gulf of Sidra thing.*

LAINGEN: Well, I'm against it, I really am.

*Q: I am too. Retaliation...*

LAINGEN: Makes me squirm. You have to think what the end result will be if you want to twist this little twerp into the ground. Everybody knows he's a twerp, so why build him up with sympathy from around the world. Why stimulate the only thing he has, which is terrorism, why stimulate that?

*Q: Why give him an excuse for striking out at innocent, uninvolved people?*

LAINGEN: Particularly, as I say, with three boys in the Navy, I sure don't want my sons involved in such raids.

*[Here there was an interruption on the tape and when the interview was resumed, the topic of the Role of the Spouse in the Foreign Service was picked up again.]*

LAINGEN: I remember going up to Peshawar. There was a young wife who had just had a new baby she was nursing. They were at this reception. We were just visitors, Bruce and I. She poured out her heart to me: "I have to get home to nurse this baby, but I don't dare, because my husband is already in trouble with the Consul General, and you know, if I go home..." I said, "This is absolutely ludicrous. Your baby needs you. That baby comes first." And she said: "Not in the Foreign Service." And she said: "I'm just dying to get home, because I need to, but I can't, I don't dare." Well, many things like that I saw going on that I just couldn't believe.

I was reprimanded by my husband's boss's wife, but there's a long story to that, too, where I had merely suggested that possibly we needed a welcome committee at this post, because a woman who had come in temporarily was not welcomed and not called upon and was complaining bitterly. And I happened to make this remark in front of this woman, unbeknownst to me, who was supposed to be in charge of her visit and evidently hadn't done her homework. So she let me have it with both guns blazing. I made a tactical error, you see, in a sweet, little naive way. As I said, there were many horror stories that I could pit against anyone else's, but I swore that when and if Bruce became an ambassador, I would not ever forget and never treat junior wives in that horrible way. But

what I didn't expect was that when Bruce did become an ambassador that the rug would be pulled out from under me. No longer was I to be the leader of these people. And certainly it left you with this terrible vacuum, this feeling of being a non-person (in a career or a lifestyle which you had made your own and to which you had devoted the better part of your life). And this is what I think our husbands don't understand.

*Q: Because it didn't happen to them.*

LAINGEN: Didn't happen to them.

*Q: No, nothing changed for them really.*

LAINGEN: But talk about mid-life crisis! There is an identity crisis when you have other wives, like the one we mentioned who went back to be an officer, rubbing your nose in the fact that you did not keep your career up, and that you are a person in your own right, and that the partnership, the two-for-the-price-of-one, is a very stupid situation to be in. (The radical chic in the seventies were saying we weren't very intelligent to serve as partners with our husbands). I mean, you really end up thinking "what have I done? I've put all my eggs in my husband's basket and I'm not ME, I'm "the wife of". It really was devastating to me. And not only that, it made me so angry in Malta to be put in that position of having to do it. There was no way I could not do it without being criticized. That, I really resented. I just vowed after that "never again", and then, of course, the hostage thing came up and I was stuck again! I was really stuck.

*Q: But, a different situation...*

LAINGEN: Well, it was different, but it was worse because it was public. And so many people say to me, "You can do what you want to do." I think maybe if you are a Political Counselor's wife and downwards, yes, perhaps. But I don't think if you are a DCM or Ambassador's wife, Chargé or Consul General's wife, I do not think the choices are there. Am I wrong? I don't know.

*Q: No, I think you're right.*

LAINGEN: I mean, the choices are there if...

*Q: If you want to make a "thing" of it.*

LAINGEN: Yes, if you want to make a thing of it.

*Q: I mean, and a choice too often these days is a DCM's wife lives in Washington on a Separate Maintenance Allowance. Who ever dreamed that one up? It was just a death knell as far as the Service was concerned. If anything, as I said in that report, there should be a maintenance allowance to try to keep people together. My question has always been what made these women act that way? When they became ambassadors'*

wives? Insecurity, what?

LAINGEN: Well, I think it's human nature. You get a little power, a sense of power...

*Q: Well, you saw that in the hostage crisis, didn't you?*

LAINGEN: Oh, yes. But you know, it's interesting, I call the Foreign Service an Upstairs/Downstairs life. I think -- I've seen it recently -- just this week. I've seen it working with women in AAFSW who have been ambassadors' wives. When you're at post and you're an ambassador's wife you are catered to very much. I saw this in Malta. It almost nauseated me. The Maltese almost climbing up your back, pawing you, (hoping to be invited to the American Residence). The servants bowing down, scraping.

When you come home -- and I always tried to keep this in my head -- suddenly you are nine servants rolled into one, and the kids are not showing you any respect, they are not picking up their rooms, and you're the cook and chauffeur and everything. There's no respect, but you still have this overblown feeling about yourself. And I saw it just the other day in a meeting, where a woman who had been an ambassador's wife recently, and someone came up and said something to her, and she turned and said: "Don't you know who I am?" They lose sight of who they really are (or aren't), and I think it's that kind of a life -- a very superficial life -- unless you keep your feet right smack on the ground about who you are and what you're up to. You do become an Imelda Marcos, very quickly.

*Q: The superficiality bothers me a lot. The pretense, and I see it now. I religiously look at McNeil-Lehrer every night just to try to find out what's going on, objectively. And when I see our Secretary of State or Assistant Secretary of State mouthing the Administration line on something that is wrong in my mind. It just makes me realize how many years our husbands have had to put up with that.*

*What was it you said -- in Pakistan, there was the ambassador who spoke out about Mrs. Kennedy and suddenly he was no longer ambassador there. To have to toe the Administration line, to have to toe the Embassy line or the Consul General line, whatever, and not be yourself, that takes its toll too. And maybe women are affected with stress or by -- what is your lovely term for stress -- psycho-motor retardation?*

LAINGEN: It's kind of a physical dyslexia (laughs). That has been my thinking about it, but I've been very careful when I've worked on the Spouse Report because I realized that there are older women, like the other women you interviewed, who were more in tune with that older life and understood it. They would never have seen themselves as dragon ladies or any of these things as anachronistic or unfair or rigid. They would have seen them quite differently. I understand that.

*Q: She saw herself, when she became an ambassador's wife, she saw herself as an impresario, being able to put into effect all that she'd learned throughout the years.*



LAINGEN: I understand that, because what was so ludicrous to me was being told that I was free, that the things were not my responsibility, but my husband's. (I'm speaking of representational responsibilities, not substantive Embassy work). I could do them if I wanted (I was told), voluntarily, but it wasn't necessary. But then when he became ambassador (I saw how little choice there was). He left, by the way, very quickly in the worst winter Washington had ever seen, in 1977. He said because Jimmy Carter had been elected and he was a Ford appointee, he was afraid he would be a lame duck appointee and recalled, so he scooted very quickly to Malta, leaving me with everything (the shopping, the sorting, the repairing and renting of the house, selling of the car, the packing, and the putting of one child in college and so forth).

Anyway, after being told how free I was, I was paid a call by Joan Wilson, who was in charge of the Overseas Briefing Center, and handed a tome as thick as my Columbia Dictionary on how to be an ambassador's wife. And I said, "But wait a minute." In the first place, all of this information -- how to dress, how to set a table, how to arrange flowers, what to wear when you're photographed, how to get off an airplane -- these are all things I had in my training. I've been working toward this moment. But now, if I'm free (of these responsibilities), what is this? I don't understand (what this tome of information is all about). To me, it's a very hypocritical policy.

Am I free or am I not? (And if I am, don't tell me how I'm supposed to behave; and if I'm not, why not recognize that fact officially?)

*Q: Did she get upset with you?*

LAINGEN: No. She said, "I understand". (Joan Wilson was one also trained in the earlier generation and she had worked on the Forum Report of 1977, I believe). But -- it was sort of -- well, the younger ones are beginning to understand. I get this line now, too, that there are some that want to know about representation, the skills and so forth. (I have also been asked, "Don't you think representation is important?" And would I not be willing to help train some of these younger women in that role -- serve as a role model? And to the first question I would answer "yes, I think representation is very important and I wish the Department thought so too." And to the second question I would answer "no, I will no longer be exploited by the Department). Well, I don't think we're ever going to go back to those days.

*Q: When I saw that article on the front page of the AAFSW News yesterday, I thought Phyllis Schafly was running amok through AAFSW (laughs). I really tried to make sure that the woman was serious. That's going too far.*

LAINGEN: There's no explanation of where that came from or who she is. Is there?

*Q: Well, I think there's something at the end that didn't make much sense to me. I really did look at it twice to see if it was a satire or...*

LAINGEN: I think it was a news article, something, but I wondered too.

*Q: Oh, here, now, I think this should have been at the head of it, but it says: "The following has been written by a Foreign Service spouse in an attempt to define the specific qualities or characteristics which exemplify what Foreign Service spouses are today," but it says the following article -- so that should have been put at the top, I guess.*

LAINGEN: She does have format problems.

*Q: The recent renderings in the press generalized the Foreign Service spouse "in ways that did not reflect reality. In future issues of this newsletter we hope to explore just what qualities today's Foreign Service spouse has acquired and how those unique qualities offer potential not only for herself but for her community as well. If you would like to contribute your thoughts on this matter, please send in articles, one-pagers, to the News Editor." And this was written by Karen Lundahl. Is she the Editor of the Newsletter?*

LAINGEN: No, Lois Turco.

*Q: Who's Karen Lundahl?*

LAINGEN: (I don't know). I think that was poor. No explanation of who she is, where it was printed.

*Q: It's called Portrait of a Foreign Service spouse.*

LAINGEN: But, you know, one of the things I learned in doing the Spouse Report is that you're not talking about a monolithic group of people. They're all ages, all interests, all talents, and maybe one of the fallacies is that an ambassador's wife is (supposed to be) an automatic leader. Maybe she's not.

*Q: Maybe she's not.*

LAINGEN: And she isn't, most likely.

*Q: Most likely not.*

LAINGEN: And...

*Q: And the interesting thing that's coming out of these interviews. Mrs. Mathews said she objected to the 1972 Directive because she said that you cannot put into writing how Foreign Service wives are going to behave. She's absolutely right. Every interview is different. It has become such an absorbing pastime. It's wonderful. I had a retired ambassador's wife tell me yesterday at lunch: "I came in at the top, I stayed at the top, and I started pushing people around right away." I said, "Can I interview you?" She said: "I have problems with my eyes so I want to get that straightened out." I can't wait to*

*get her on tape! (laughs) She's an enormously intelligent woman and has known my husband's family for years and years. And my mother-in-law worried that she would never get married because she wouldn't be able to find anyone smart enough for her. And then, this pearl dropped from her lips as we were driving home, and I thought, I really must penetrate this and find out her viewpoints. She's extremely articulate.*

LAINGEN: Well, I think that's wonderful, but I think it's misplaced energy. And I think we're glad to be rid of the "dragon ladies". I'm glad we're rid of them. I never had any doubt about that. But what I do feel -- doubt -- is the separation of the identity and the interests of the spouse -- those who are interested in the Foreign Service. The lack of encouragement to keep them in, to keep them going, so that the role (means something and has purpose). The role has ended up being so degraded that none of us really want to get near it with a ten foot pole.

*Q: Well, I think the FLO office is responsible for this.*

LAINGEN: Sure, it is.

*Q: That you're not employed; you're useless.*

LAINGEN: That's right, but the Department is too. I believe the official policy and putting in a Separate Maintenance just encourages this separation of families (and mutual objectives in representation abroad).

*Q: It was self-destructive.*

LAINGEN: I mean, who wants to go -- I would not want to go overseas today if my role is simply to dress up night after night and go talk to people that I really don't care that much about.

If I felt I was a part of it and it was recognized that I had a role to play (that was meaningful), sure, (I'd do it). Otherwise, it's just more years of deferring what you really want to do in your life. What is you. And that is so wrong. There must be some way women can be a part of the life in which they must lead their lives -- If they are going to stay married.

*Q: Well, your report says that the young woman who has limited representational responsibilities, her family -- she's the happiest -- so what's our problem? What's the problem with the Department that they can't see that?*

*(Here again the interview was interrupted and never completed. Penne Laingen has added an addendum to this discussion.)*

LAINGEN: Our report said, yes, that the woman who has few responsibilities in representational work and has time to spend on her own family and her own interests is

the happiest. It also said that the lowest morale in the Foreign Service is found among Senior Foreign Service spouses who do three times the number of hours in representational work of others and who resent their lack of options and recognition for their contributions. They do not see their work as voluntary -- not necessarily in every case -- and they are still locked out of employment possibilities because of conflict of interest. Many must give up their jobs and own interests in order to fulfill the expected role. So far, the only response from the Department to this hypocritical situation has been to warn younger couples coming into the Foreign Service that such is the situation for spouses and that's the way it is, be warned that nothing's bound to change. Compensation for these spouses in the senior ranks and any form of recognition of their contributions have not been forthcoming.

On the presumption that these interviews are to one day be of use to future historians or researchers into the unique peculiarities of Foreign Service spouses -- a term which some feel is now extinct -- I am adding a summary tape to my interview in order to pull together some of my seemingly contradictory or ambivalent remarks.

From a historical perspective, I look upon my generation of Foreign Service spouses as one caught between the old and the new, riding the cusp of change between an elite, traditional, protocol-conscious group of husbands and wives and a more egalitarian, less-structured Service of individual careerists. My generation of spouses had its fundamental training rooted in the former system, which was based upon a hierarchical system that both husbands and wives belonged to, adhered to, and believed in, so that there was general acceptance by all spouses of the rules of protocol, the privileges of rank, and the demands of the Service upon them. We have also witnessed the dissolution of the hierarchy of spouses which, through a Policy Directive put out in 1972, attempted to abolish some of the abuses of the system by removing spouses from their husbands' efficiency reports and freeing them (supposedly) from the responsibility of representational work.

As I have pointed out in my interview, my first posting to Pakistan was fraught with hardships that today I would not accept, not only because I am older and hopefully more confident in my own abilities, but also because the system as it once was, no longer exists. But before we congratulate ourselves on ridding the Foreign Service of an anachronistic, rigid, and sometimes demeaning system for women, let me hasten to say that -- having had a taste of both systems -- I feel the Foreign Service has lost more than it has gained through the changes. Younger spouses will not -- perhaps -- agree with me, but they do not have the same historical perspective as I.

In any revolution, which surely the women's liberation movement was, the radical chic take their arguments over the cliff in order to bring about fundamental change. Some have said that in the Foreign Service, this revolutionary pendulum swung too far or that women threw the baby out with the bath water. Those of us who protested the 1972 Directive were totally misunderstood. We were called sadomasochists for complying to the rules of protocol and the dictates of senior spouses. And senior spouses -- not all of whom were

"dragon ladies" -- were said to resent the loss of their traditional right to victimize junior spouses. To the contrary, our objections centered more around the loss of our *raison d'être* and our sense of belonging to the Foreign Service. For those of us whose husbands were in senior positions, the 1972 Directive seemed hypocritical, for, simply stated, we found it impossible to be private persons in what was essentially a very public life. We did not seem to have the same freedom, the same options or choices of younger spouses to "do our own thing," which was the cry of the day. Having devoted our lives to the Foreign Service and thinking of it as our own career, the policy had the unfortunate effect of telling us we were no longer needed.

Under the old system, the overriding value that kept us going from post to post was our innate sense of belonging. We felt as much a part of this elite group of people as our husbands. Everything we endured -- from boiling vats of water to dropping calling cards, from packing and unpacking our households to attending endless receptions, from parasites and culture shock to performing charitable acts -- had purpose and meaning to us as unofficial, people-to-people diplomats. Our contributions were recognized by the U.S. Government, so that we were not excess baggage that our husbands carried along with them, but were instead full-fledged partners in spreading a good American image.

Secondly, the hierarchy of spouses -- despite the sometimes unreasonable demands of senior spouses, provided a framework for welcoming newcomers to strange lands and drawing them into the community. I remember going through a receiving line my first week in Pakistan when the DCM's wife asked me what my interests and talents were, and when I listed them, she said: "Well then, we'll place you in the orphanage to teach the girls how to sew. Yes, it was difficult, like being dunked into a fast-moving stream of activity. There was no time for homesickness, self-pity, nor for that matter for frustration over not having something meaningful to do. We were welcomed and oriented from the first hour of our arrival in Pakistan -- hence, my description of having to take my baby to the first dinner party in Karachi.

I believe it was this community orientation and togetherness which made life abroad so appealing in those days. We were pioneers. The majority of Foreign Service couples preferred to live abroad, not only because the living was grand with servants and big houses (which is the general conception people have of us in the Foreign Service), but because we functioned as a community and esprit de corps was evident even in the most difficult hardship posts. There is a great deal to be said for the stiff upper lip attitude, I think, as opposed to continual griping and grievances against the injustices of the lifestyle. And there is much to be said for self-help as a way to overcome psychological problems and low morale.

With all its faults then, the hierarchy of spouses gave our existence meaning and a sense of belonging. When I came home on leave, I felt many of my counterparts in the U.S. led rather prosaic lives compared to mine. How odd now that the coin has turned. Foreign Service spouses today are trying desperately to catch up with their American counterparts by seeking employment or meaningful occupation. There is a great deal of dissatisfaction

with the lifestyle which hampers continuity in work skills, which denies spouses the opportunity to find jobs overseas and which inhibits spouses from gaining tenure or writing adequate resumes. There is now a separate maintenance allowance which, in effect, pays spouses to stay home, rather than paying them to go abroad. The representational work spouses once did as recognized partners in diplomacy has been degraded as something not worthy of intelligent, modern women with independent identities.

In my interview, I speak of the lack of respect for my role in the Iranian hostage crisis. It was not that I desired to be Queen Bee as wife of the Chief of Mission, but I recognized the need for leadership and felt a certain responsibility for the hostage families. I was perhaps a symbol, if you will, or an example to the American people as well as to the other hostage families of how we ought to behave toward Iran in that very public international arena. As I pointed out, had I misbehaved and gone against the Government, I would have been called into the Department for a reprimand, as one other wife was, and told that this was one case where the 1972 Directive could not hold true. I was seen as a part of the Foreign Service and the way I conducted myself would reflect on that Service. My point is, when the chips are down, Foreign Service spouses are a part of the system, no matter how much they may long for independent identities or chaff at doing boring representational work.

Under the new system of separate careerists, which frankly does not meld comfortably with the Foreign Service lifestyle in my opinion, there is more ambivalence among spouses than ever before. Yes, there are more choices, but they aren't necessarily happier choices. While the Department tries valiantly to come to grips with the problems of tandem couples and spouse employment abroad, they continue to neglect the most serious morale problem in the Service. That is, the lack of recognition for the contributions of spouses, mainly senior spouses, to American diplomacy. Senior spouses continue to carry out three times the number of hours in representational work of other spouses, not because they choose to do so in every case, but primarily because they have to. I recently talked to one of my successors in Malta who was going through the same experience I had faced there. She would like more free time to pursue her own interests, but finds it next to impossible.

Other than staying home on a Separate Maintenance Allowance, which does not help one's marriage, she has no other choice but to conform to the expectations that exist in Malta for her as the ambassador's wife. What I am saying is -- whether pay for such spouses is the answer or not -- the Department of State needs to formulate a new policy which recognizes this work as meaningful and important to the U.S. Government. Some say that when younger spouses

"come of age" and their husbands become ambassadors, they will not do the representational work. I'm not sure this will be true. I read recently of the wife of the Ambassador to Western Germany, Gayle Burt, who had had to give up a very exciting career as Mrs. Reagan's social secretary in order to fulfill the role that surely is expected

of her in that country. And still, ambassador's wives are denied the opportunity to be Community Liaison Officers or be employed within embassies as other wives, the presumption being that, not only is there conflict of interest, but that such spouses choose the role of representation happily and freely. As I said concerning the incident of the Canadian ambassador's wife slapping her social secretary -- the social secretary is paid to get it right, while the ambassador's wife -- if things go wrong -- gets all the blame. This is a system of inequity in my opinion and the reason for such low morale among senior spouses.

It is my feeling -- to sum up -- that somehow the Foreign Service needs to revive the spirit of partnership. It may be that society's trends will move into a more balanced position which will make this partnership again possible, but it will first require that the representational role be seen as a viable, broader, and more essential one than it is today. In our 1985 Spouse Report, we concluded that the Department of State would do well to recruit, train and send abroad couples (in effect making everyone in the Foreign Service tandem couples), each having separate, but equal, responsibilities to carry out. And there should be more attempt to use the considerable talents and skills of spouses, which would not only be more cost effective than bringing in highly-paid consultants, but give meaning to the context in which spouses must lead their lives overseas. That's the vision I have of the future system, which invokes a bit of the old and the present.

In 1971, upon my return from Afghanistan, where my husband had been Deputy Chief of Mission, serving under Ambassador Robert G. Neumann, I was called by Gladys Rodgers (in State Management) to attend a meeting in the State Department. It was not made clear to me what the gist of the meeting was, and having been out of the country for three years, I was not fully attuned to the changes that were going on in relation to women, both officers and spouses, in the Foreign Service.

We were ushered into a large room and placed in a circle of chairs around the room. Present were Mrs. William Rogers, wife of the Secretary of State, and Ambassador William Macomber (Secretary for Management); also Melissa Wells, an FSO, women from WAO (Women's Action Organization), secretaries, and one other spouse besides myself, Carol Pardon, who I later learned was in the vanguard of change for spouses in the Service.

My memory of the meeting is hazy, except for a few instances of discussion in which I was directly involved. Melissa Wells was interested in being able to serve at post with her officer husband. Secretaries were mainly disgruntled with their low status abroad. One woman officer, who had been sent home from Saudi Arabia by the Ambassador, because in that conservative society she was not able to perform her duties as well as she might otherwise do, was protesting her dismissal. We were asked to give our reasons for appearing at the meeting, and as luck would have it, the discussion began with the person on my left, making me the last one to answer.

The general feeling was that ambassadors' wives had too much power at post, although

one person said that she had found wives of Deputy Chiefs of Mission to be the true "witches" of the Foreign Service. Carol Pardon was promoting her idea of disbanding the hierarchy of spouses. By the time the conversation came around to me, I was forced to say that I was not clear why I was at the meeting, other than to represent the "witches " of the Foreign Service!

While I agreed that there were enormous problems with the hierarchy of spouses, having my own list of horror stories to tell, and wanted the demands upon spouses lessened, I also suggested that to completely destroy it would not only be to disrupt a system of welcoming newcomers to post and a method of offering continuity for families between posts, but also to destroy the "raison d'etre" of a great many women who felt they were a part of the Foreign Service. I considered throwing everything out the window would cause a severe morale problem.

At that point, Macomber jumped down my throat, saying that was "just too bad", since they were causing morale problems among others, and it was time for change. I was not brave enough to continue with my line of thinking, as I could see the die was cast. Little did I know then that the Department was faced with possible litigation and was anxious to get itself off the legal hook.

On the case of the woman officer who had been sent home from Saudi Arabia, however, I did comment that perhaps she would be better off, career-wise, to seek a post in which she could fully participate and succeed; that it was not up to us to change the cultural patterns of other countries; and that the ambassador had probably done her a favor by sending her on somewhere else.

## **INTERVIEW #2**

*Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi and Joan Williamson*

*Initial interview date: August 30, 1990*

LAINGEN: (beginning mid-sentence) that he probably did her a favor by sending her on somewhere else. Macomber just wheeled on me and said, "I disagree! We're going to teach these countries our way of life. We want our women to have the equality and-" It really just floored me, because it was the total opposite to what I'd been led to believe or trained in going overseas, that we were guests in these countries, that we should not show American arrogance. My opinion, you see, was not on the ascendancy, it was descending in our society, and he was simply not going to let the momentum die out.

*Q (Fenzi): He was also non-career.*

LAINGEN: The other thing was, when Carol Pardon was talking I agreed with most of what she said. This is the interesting thing that later I'll tell you about -- a letter where people misunderstood what I was saying. At any rate, she was against the hierarchy of



spouses and the anachronisms of protocol, dropping cards and so forth, and the way women were second-class citizens, appendages to their husbands and all that. She wanted to wipe the whole slate clean. I remember saying at that point, "I agree with you up to a point but there are women who have devoted their whole lives to the Foreign Service, who take this partnership seriously. And you destroy that *raison d'etre*, you're going to (laughing) have more problems than you can imagine. And again Macomber said, "Too late. You're out of step."

So I thought to myself, I don't know why I came [to the meeting], because they've got it all in their heads how it's to be, how it's going to be. I really didn't care, at that point, because we were posted at home and I could be free of all the disagreeableness, (laughter) until 1977, when my husband was appointed Ambassador to Malta. I remember at my husband's swearing in someone came up to me and said, "I wonder what kind of an ambassador's wife you're going to make." I recall saying, "Look, I'm not an 'ambassador's wife', I happen to be married to the ambassador." I'd picked up the line that everybody was splicing, and trying to go along with the Directive and understand it. I hope you've interviewed Sallie Lewis (Fenzi says "yes") because she could tell you of Marlen (Neumann's) reaction and her reaction to the Directive when it came out at post in Afghanistan.

*Q (Williamson): They just went right on doing what they were doing.*

LAINGEN: Oh, they did? See, I missed all that.

*Q (Fenzi): What was the outcome of that first meeting? Because that was the very first meeting when they got everybody together.*

LAINGEN: I'm not even sure of that, I'd have to look back in the files. But it was Gladys Rogers, whoever she was --

*Q (Fenzi): She must have been a member of WAO.*

LAINGEN: I sort of thought she was a Department, maybe Macomber's deputy.

*Q (Fenzi): Oh, that could be. We'll look her up.*

LAINGEN: We'll have to look her up. She was in charge of that meeting. Whether it was the first I don't know, but it was certainly the Women's Action Organization that had called it together.

*Q (Fenzi): But had anything been published about --*

LAINGEN: Nothing at all. I know that.

*Q (Fenzi): But see, the first published thing was June 1971, and that was the Guidelines*

*which were drafted under Dorothy Stansbury. But this was before that?*

LAINGEN: Yes. Because the Guidelines -- I have all this, I'm going to give you a photocopy that talks about the Guidelines. Then there were numerous reactions to the Guidelines that were in. Here's from Ambassadors, John Kenneth Galbraith's reactions, and so forth. I also have Carol Pardon's article for you. You know, at the time she seemed very revolutionary to those of us who had been immersed in this traditional system. I can look at it now and think, "Gee, why didn't we see that?" How clear headed she was. But I really didn't have much quarrel with her, I just thought it was sort of revolutionary and it probably would never work.

*Q (Fenzi): Do you have Eleanore Lee writing as "Mary Stuart" in that same issue, saying that the Guidelines would never work, because it didn't matter what kind of guidelines you set forth for the wife, it depended on what the Ambassador and his spouse would like. We do have a copy of that, too.*

LAINGEN: That is really the point that hit me square in the face when I got to Malta. I had no choice as an ambassador's wife.

*Q (Fenzi): Let's go back a moment What happened after that first meeting?*

LAINGEN: I heard nothing.

*Q (Fenzi): Oh, you did nothing more.*

LAINGEN: No. I think I was just a total failure, you see, because I was representing the wrong "mode", the wrong side. (laughter)

*Q (Fenzi): You didn't go to any of the open forums?*

LAINGEN: No. I never knew about them. It's really strange. I had a young baby. I probably wasn't too keyed in. I remember hearing about it after the fact. I wished that I had. Yes, this WAO group suggested that this forum take place. That I know was a step. Then, here is this international dialogue among Foreign Service women, so they had that; also, they brought in some of the foreign embassies to see what they thought. At any rate, I know that later on I heard how the Directive came about and I have a memo on that if you want me to insert that now.

That was when we were working on the 1985 Spouse Report. Kathleen Boswell and I, who were co-chairmen, went to see Mr. Robert S. Steven, a former staffer for William B. Macomber. We had lunch at the Foreign Service Club and he told us various things concerning how the Directive came about. [reading] "The decision to go ahead with the Directive was taken when William B. Macomber was Deputy Under Secretary for Management." Steven was a member of Macomber's staff and designated as the liaison between the Women's Action Organization and M [Management]. "Mr. Steven said that

M decided to look into the spouse question because of an ever increasing number of spouse related grievances and because WAO was becoming militant on women's issues. Pressure from the two sources motivated M to put together several panels ..." see, the one that I attended was one of those panels, "some composed of Department of State principals and some composed of representative spouses to consider the problem. M also asked WAO to present its proposals for reform concerning Foreign Service spouses to the Open Forum." So that's how that came about.

"M initially saw no reason to change the policy on spouses." Now, that was interesting to us because, you see, here it is 1985 and we are seeing all the problems that stem from that Directive -- not the Directive per se, but from outcroppings of what happened after that. Interestingly enough, we see that some people in M were kind of worried and felt exactly as I did, that you destroy the system totally, you're going to have women out there whose *raison d'etre* is destroyed, too.

*Q (Fenzi): You're making this comment as of 1971 or 1985?*

LAINGEN: This is 1983, actually. And that Mr. Steven says that even before they formulated the Directive they knew they were going to have problems, but they went ahead with it anyway.

*Q (Fenzi): Well, Hope [Meyers] had a comment on that. She said that the Department just assumed that there would be enough senior spouses to pick up the pieces and carry on as they had in the past. And that's absolutely what happened.*

LAINGEN: And if you look at the Directive, it does say "Oh, we'd be so happy if you do go on" and "we have no objections to wives who choose to go on and do this." But what the psychological aspect of that was saying "we don't care whether you do it, it would be nice if you do it, but you're really not necessary." And that was a lethal thing to do. I mean, for some women. Now, for the younger ones who didn't have these representational responsibilities, WHOOPEE! The doors were open, "I don't have to drop cards any more." And for some of us -- I had more horror stories than anybody about that system, in fear and trembling as a young spouse, so I was happy to be rid of it.

But when I got to Malta, I suddenly realized, as an ambassador's wife, that the freedom was not for me. It was declared hypocritically, really, because what the Department did was destroy the partnership when it was still there, as you said. As long as the hierarchy of officers exists, the wife spouse cannot be easily divorced from it, and you've got problems within the family. Janet Lloyd told me (laughing) that FLO had become "a walking divorce court" at the time when she first took over. At any rate, to get back to this -- I'm sorry to keep bouncing back and forth -- but here is Robert Steven telling us that they really were concerned at that time. What tipped the balance in the decision, though, was the opinion of the Department of State's lawyer who, upon reviewing the traditional status of spouses, "found existing policy to be legally indefensible because the spouse was not an employee." So here you've got the Department of State trying to avoid

litigation. (Pro bono attorney for the Foreign Service Spouse Oral History said that a spouse could not litigate, but that the FSO could file suit on her behalf.) And that is the main reason that Directive was written. (No references to this have been found in researching pre Directive documents.) It was to get the Department of State off the legal hook.

*Q (Fenzi): Do you mean to tell me that a spouse was going to sue the Department because they were making demands upon her-*

LAINGEN: Illegal demands.

*Q (Fenzi): I didn't think you could sue the United States Government.*

LAINGEN: Oh, yes, you can sue the State Department, certainly.

*Q (Williamson): You can sue the Secretary of State. That's where that Alison Palmer --*

*Q (Fenzi): Maybe you can sue an individual but I don't think you can sue the Government.*

*Q (Williamson): I think you may be right, Jewell. Because the discrimination suit that was brought, as far as the women and Alison Palmer et al., was brought against the Secretary of State -- as, I assume, the representative of the Department.*

LAINGEN: I suppose a spouse could sue an ambassador. Right?

*Q (Fenzi): It would be interesting to find out who those lawyers were who felt that this was a problem, and whether there was actually a case about which they were concerned.*

LAINGEN: Well, these were State Department lawyers, so it could easily be found -- who was Legal Adviser at that time.

*Q (Fenzi): This would be early '71 [confirmed by the others].*

LAINGEN: The Department of State had to clarify its legal position to avoid litigation, so I think you can sue the State Department. According to Mr. Steven, it was not a welcome decision because M fully realized the positive contribution of the spouse to the Foreign Service and did not diminish the traditional relationship. Mr. Steven was asked to re-word the WAO proposals, which I thought was interesting because they were written in what was considered "strident language" (the three all laugh) "and to incorporate those proposals with a legally defensible status for the Foreign Service spouse. That status was 'no status', in what became the 1972 policy on wives of Foreign Service employees."

Now, that statement is Mr. Steven. That "status", he says, was really "no status". "Mr. Steven has not been directly involved in the spouse issue since he left M but he continues

to follow it out of personal interest." (laughter again) "More recently Mr. Steven as an inspector was disturbed by what he saw as a trend towards further distancing of the Department of State and spouses. He felt that Department initiatives like the establishment of FLO and separate maintenance allowance increased the distance initiated by the 1972 decision, but he suggested that the Foreign Service is changing too. As an inspector for the Management audit of the recruitment, examination and employment function of the Department of State, he became aware of a growing gap between the traditional Foreign Service and the type of officer now coming into the Foreign Service. He said that what may be seen as a lack of commitment by the spouse might be only a reflection of the lack of commitment by the officer." I thought that was interesting!

"He said that his audit had not included a recommendation to the Director General to commission a demographic study of the Personnel system. He knew that the Director General had recently contracted with a consulting firm to undertake this study, and he suggested that we approach the Director General on the possibility of including the Forum Committee's Role of the Spouse questionnaire in the consultant's forthcoming questionnaire." Which we didn't: we went off and got our own money.

At any rate, I felt, reading this morning's paper about these soldiers and women soldiers, in Saudi Arabia, and someone has written a Letter to the Editor [presumably of The Washington Post] saying that these women are no different than men soldiers, they should be treated the same and so forth -- total misunderstanding of the idea that we are guests in these countries. We cannot, as Americans, go in, which we do so often, and just ram our culture down everyone's throat. So, to this day I would love to talk to Macomber about it. Maybe he's mellowed by now. (all laugh)

At any rate, that was that meeting. And as I say, when it came down to being an ambassador's wife, the Directive was totally incomprehensible to me. I was working very, very hard. I had no choice in the matter. It was in a very small, 100% Catholic country, family oriented, traditional, It had been under British rule in the days of the Raj ,and they expected all the women to troop out in their formal dresses. It was still that way, and sometimes when I didn't go to a function, I would run into a Maltese who would say, "Where were you? Were you sick?" I mean, it was impossible. It had just had to be undertaken. Otherwise, I could have left post (laughter). I really was a painter and a writer, and I longed to do these things, but I simply didn't have the time.

It was sort of ironic because I helped a young staff officer's wife. I introduced her to a friend who was an opera star, and Carol picked up on her career. I sat there and watched her on stage, you know, yet was unable to do the things that I wanted to do. So in 1978, here comes from Janet Lloyd's office, the new FLO office, a letter suggesting that they are going to review the Directive. Now, this came out of the 1977 Forum report which made various recommendations. One was to establish the Family Liaison Office, and among other things was to "Let's get this Directive straight for those spouses who are not free." Do you know, of that 1977 report, it's interesting: this is the one issue that has never been solved. They did everything else that those folks recommended, except that.

*Q (Fenzi): When Janet sent that letter, who was recommending that the Directive be reviewed? FLO?*

LAINGEN: Well, you see, that's what I'm saying: From the 1977 Forum report, she's trying to -- not only did she (Janet Lloyd) come into position because of that report, but she was taking all these recommendations step by step. So, one was to review the Directive. Here: "Department to review the '72 directive on Spouses." And, she said, she sent it to all posts, and she said, "if you don't vote don't crab." So immediately I called all the gals in the Embassy together and we sat down -- I didn't have a traditional "wives group" or anything like that, but everyone was interested and happy to come and talk about it. And every single one of those gals sat down and wrote a paper on all her feelings about this Directive and many other side issues.

I remember one older wife was very worried about retirement and the pensions and so forth. The only wife, however, who was really angry about the system and wanted to be free of it had five children, and she and her husband were fighting like cats and dogs, have since divorced, over the issue. He was a real martinet. He would come and ask, "Have you written your thank you note to Mrs. De Medici," (or something) and she'd say, "That's not my job, that's your job." With that kind of thing going on, that marriage did split. At any rate we all wrote a paper. My idea was that while we welcomed the changes in the strict, rigid protocol, et cetera, and that I didn't particularly care about being "an ambassador's wife," i.e., I wasn't bothered at not being able to direct junior wives, but I felt there was merit to a system where you could go to any post and fit in immediately, you were welcomed, there was an apparatus. And nothing had been substituted for that apparatus.

Maybe FLO would be that eventually, and I suppose it has been, for CLOs. But at that point, when I arrived at this small post I was astounded to find that certain wives didn't know one another, that my predecessor had made no effort to draw the spouses together. It just seemed incredible to me. Now, I could have let that go, I could have done the same thing, I expect. But I can tell you, we had a very happy association, and I believe there was merit to trying to continue to foster that kind of community spirit. And I felt it did fall, kind of, to the ambassador's wife to do that. She may not be a natural leader, but I felt there was deference in that direction, that people did look to you whether you took that role or not.

That was the gist of my paper. And I felt that while I didn't want the total Directive rewritten, I felt that something should be added to encourage those of us who were not as free as this policy says. At any rate I was astounded to find that the reaction was totally negative against any revision. But as it turned out, they got 63 responses, 36 of which opposed revising the Directive. I was just appalled. I thought, "36 people are responsible for saying how it will stay." There was something wrong with that.

*Q (Fenzi): Well, there must have been an even smaller minority who got the Directive put*

*in place in the first place.*

LAINGEN: Right! (she laughs) And mostly men. (she laughs) I think David Newsom doesn't dare look me in the eye these days.

*Q (Fenzi): I don't know him, nor Martin Hillenbrand either, but he was a high ranking Department official who was responsible also. (Newsom and Hillenbrand as chiefs of African and European bureaus respectively, signed the Directive to show cohesiveness in the Department, no matter how diversified the bureau.)*

*Q (Williamson): So, there were 36 responses for, and 27 against. It's only 60% that supported no revisions.*

*Q (Fenzi): It was not unanimous by any means.*

*Q (Williamson): Not unanimous, but very few responded at all.*

LAINGEN: Right. But the thing that has always been the problem -- I found this true in doing the 1985 report -- is that we do everything by majority. And it really shouldn't work that way, because we're not talking about a monolithic group of women, or spouses (murmurs of agreement). So in our spouse report we had to look at the various groups that we're talking about, and by breaking it down that way, the minority definitely in numbers is the group of senior Foreign Service spouses (today, I have to say "spouses of senior officers"), we found they had the lowest morale in the Foreign Service. Yet they were doing two-thirds of the number of hours of representational work and they did not feel they were free. So you could say "the majority, they aren't put upon." But, see, that doesn't tell you anything. That's not fair to the minority. Because the majority doesn't have the representational expectations that are on the minority's shoulders. So that was the way I felt about this decision taking the majority word that everything was just hunky-dory the way it was. To me that was wrong.

*Q (Williamson): So what happened then, Penne. To go back a bit, in '78, then, after they got this 36-24 vote or whatever it was, what happened then?*

LAINGEN: That was IT.

*Q (Williamson): They just decided -- Janet Lloyd dropped it then at that point?*

LAINGEN: Just dropped it. I was so appalled by that that I wrote a letter, which appeared in the October 1978 issue -- now that I look back I smile, because it was rather naive. Anyway, I have a letter here from Janet Lloyd, who says: "I very much enjoyed talking to you and the Newsletter was so impressed with your letter that they plan on publishing it next month." So, they did, and here it is: "An Ambassador's Wife Enters the Debate." Generally I was saying that while the Directive meant well, some of us were not as free as it implied. That has always been my basis for feeling, because at that point in time the

Department was telling me I was free to do anything I wanted, and that was just not correct. And at the same time, there was no way of their telling me "thank you," either. So you begin to think, "Gee, I put all my eggs in this basket, this partnership which meant so much to me for 30 years, and then suddenly it means nothing to anybody. Therefore, what am I?" In those days, we didn't talk about "self esteem," we didn't talk about ourselves that much, did we? We did the work, and talked about our husbands, I guess.

*Q (Fenzi): That's quite true, you know. Often, I'll ask people, "Do you have a resume, or something about your career?" And they'll invariably give you some writeup on what their husbands have done; those in our generation.*

LAINGEN: It's sad. But there's much to be said for the women's lib movement, I'm not saying there isn't. However, I feel that the juncture of the Directive was the point where, instead of throwing out the partnership, they should have made it more important and said to the others, "You're free, you're all free to do what you want to do, but if you choose to do this, this is what we will do for you." At that point, they should have paid us, or they should have done something to keep that partnership strong and keep it a viable role. But perhaps they couldn't have - with the feeling of individualism, and independence, and liberation that was so prevalent then.

*Q (Williamson): And always fighting a budget. They've never been very clever at getting money out of Congress for anything, let alone -- I mean, the essentials they barely get the money for. To get it for something beyond that is usually turned down, because they don't know how to fight for it.*

LAINGEN: But, you see, the thing that was so wrong was that a social movement in this country, which was trying to get women to strike out on their own (there were a number of divorces, women had to fall back on something if their husbands left them, and so forth) it was a movement which really didn't fit into the Foreign Service life style very well. As we say in the 1985 Spouse Report, it was like fitting a round peg into a square hole. Now, it was bound to move toward a Service of single careerists --

*Q (Williamson): Which it has.*

LAINGEN: Did you find the Foreign Service Journal article (summer, 1990)? (They reply, "Yes.") Now, the singles are unhappy, "hanh -hanh- hanhhh!" [like whines]

*Q (Williamson): Well, they're bound to be.*

*Q (Fenzi): The thing that struck me about the singles article was that there was no suggestion that anyone make a sacrifice in the line of duty, no concept of service in the Foreign Service, it was all the introspective "me" solution to things. Of course, it was written by a woman who was not a Foreign Service officer. She's a Washington free lance writer .*



*At the end of my 1978 letter, (in State Magazine) I said, "Hand in hand with the women's liberation movement has come a most unfortunate trend in attitudes towards traditional wives. The Foreign Service, it seems, is no different in that respect. To read that the best preparation for being the wife of a diplomat is an '8th grade education and a love of the kitchen' makes me very sad, and angry, too. This attitude lies between the lines of the 1972 Directive because it implies that a wife is an unnecessary appendage to her husband. We seem also to have lost all our ideals that helped to make our country great -- volunteerism, patriotism, pioneering, selflessness, neighborliness, public service. It's no wonder that we've reached the point where we have to be paid for everything that we do." Well, what happened after that: I got a number of personal letters, saying "right on, a great letter, etc. etc." but no one publicly supported me.*

*Q (Williamson): Did you get any public disagreement?*

LAINGEN: Oh, yes, yes, I did. And the next issue of State magazine carried a letter from Carolyn Barrett, who I learned later was a young AID wife. Among other things she said that "females have been traditionally socialized toward such sadomasochistic roleplaying in most societies. It blocks authentic behavior and helps anesthetize the individual to the pain their position would otherwise cause them." She called me a sadomasochist for continuing to work without pay. And she says, "Women who have been born, reared and lived in an environment that allows them the authentic self-expressions do not fit comfortably in the traditional role of the diplomat's wife." She said what I really was upset about was "the loss of my traditional right to victimize junior spouses."

Another letter came from Harrison B. Sherwood. The essence of his letter was that there is no way the traditional wife can get back her self esteem unless she is paid, because she has been legally removed from the system. Then there was a letter from Elinor Constable, who says she'd been a longtime friend of Penne Laingen and hoped that she didn't upset me if she disagreed with me. Her general thesis was that the Directive should not be changed, because what it really did was excuse women from "a narrow, institutionalized responsibility and freed them to a broader responsibility." What? To themselves?

You see, that is the fallacy of the idea that you're free of all responsibility, by being your own person you have a broader outlook. I think, what greater responsibility can there be but to your country, to your family, to your husband, to your children? I don't understand it, myself. And I don't to this day. However, she was one who had been an officer, came back into the Service, and she has been an ambassador. We're still friends. But I can't understand it -- when her husband was back here, she was always overseas or something. They've lived apart for a number of years. So that was the system that was being created. But the thing that upset me about Elinor's letter was that, again, she misunderstood in a way what I was saying. I didn't care about the hierarchy, I didn't care about victimizing junior spouses - I simply was saying, "Hey, I mean, if I'm free, free me!" Let me be as free as any other spouse. And I still feel this -- in my interview that I did with you, Jewell, I said to this day an ambassador's wife is not allowed to work, she can't be a CLO. So she's not "free." She still is not free of these responsibilities unless she leaves the post.

*Q (Williamson): Well, she's still going to have the responsibilities anyway -- there's no way she can get out of them unless she plans to hide out in the back scullery corner.*

LAINGEN: Well, then people did come to my rescue. Including my husband, who said, "I've known Penne Laingen a long time and I don't find her sadomasochistic." (hearty laughs)

*Q (Fenzi): Well, fortunately for that, Penne!*

LAINGEN: "And I find such allegations unfair, unfounded and unnecessary."

*Q (Williamson): But how extraordinary that this whole debate evolved this way, you know?*

LAINGEN: It just turned ugly, it really did. I had a lovely letter from Anne MacFarland. She was an officer and she married one. She said she totally agreed with me and said, "I can see both sides." And then the loveliest thing was to have the Embassy wives come to my rescue. One letter: "Observing Mrs. Laingen, one can only wonder at the official policy which states that the Foreign Service wife is free to follow her own interests." So I think that's very nice.

Then I returned to the US in 1979. I was really looking forward to being home. Bruce was going into the Inspection Corps, he didn't really have another post, so as an Inspector he was to set off for South America. He went to Minnesota to visit his family. Meanwhile I'd been in Malta packing up, so we were apart from his departure in January until March when I got home. He went to Minnesota, then back to Malta for the CFCE conference. What I'm getting at is that we were really apart for all of 1979, because in May when he was in Minnesota the Department called and asked would he go to Tehran -- just for 4-6 weeks to fill in for Charlie Naas, who was the chargé d'affaires, as I believe was stated in my earlier interview.

I was very happy to be home, able to set up my household, get up every morning having my own routine, and really (she laughs) take the Directive seriously! Then, as you know, BANG, Bruce was taken hostage. You could say, "Well, you're free to do your own thing. You're your own person." I could have gone about and said what I really thought about the President or the policies on Iran. But you are, as I've said so many times to young wives, you really are in the Foreign Service. I don't care how you slice it, as long as you're married to this individual you really have to consider the Foreign Service. Had I misbehaved during the hostage crisis, I think they (the Department officials) would have called me in and said, "Huh uh, this is a no-no, you can't behave this way." (They did reprimand another wife for criticizing the Department publicly.)

But also as a result of the Directive, I got no support from the Department as Bruce's wife. You see what I'm saying. They would call me in, yes, as an individual, "How are

you feeling" and so forth, but when the Bishop is calling me, from the Cathedral, deferring to me as the wife of the chief of mission in Tehran, there are expectations that you have a role there. And I did not get any support in that role from the Department of State. Probably it doesn't matter; it's insignificant. But it just points up the hypocrisy of the whole policy.

Now, yesterday, when I see Mrs. Nathaniel Howell at the airport greeting the families coming home from Kuwait and Iraq, and seeing she has the support, she has the Department saying "you should be there," that's what I did not have throughout that whole hideous 1979-81 crisis; which I think is wrong. Not only that, but afterwards never once did any official say "thank you for the way you did behave." Not once.

*Q (Fenzi): No letters or anything?*

LAINGEN: Nothing, absolutely nothing. And during the crisis, not one official saying, "Can I take your son to a basketball game?" Or "How's your car?" or "How's your house?" "Your finances?" Nothing. The families who were coming in from the outside -- they had a quota of two people to bring: a mother and father, or a wife and a child, and would have their way paid to Washington to attend these meetings or to go to the Cathedral services or whatnot. So I said, "Is it possible for my son, in college in Minnesota, who is up there facing the media alone (and so forth) to have his way home paid to come to the meeting with me?" "No," they said, "we're not going to start a precedent." It was bad, very bad. And I hope to goodness that the Department has learned something from that.

*Q (Fenzi and Williamson): We shall see.*

*Q (Fenzi): And so that experience led you to become involved in the spouse committee of the Forum to do the report?*

LAINGEN: Right. (some discussion as to year of the report) The committee meeting began in '83. Now... let's see how that came about. (she shows them a picture) I participated in the Georgetown Symposium --

*Q (Fenzi): We have that. This was 1981.*

LAINGEN: My point in the Georgetown symposium essay was precisely that it really was a moot point, because my husband was still a hostage when I wrote that, and whether I was suggesting that the only solution I could see was to ask a spouse if she wants to be a partner or an individual, if she says "partner" then pay her to do the work.

So then I was called in to be on this committee of AAFSW part of the Forum, called the Spouse Committee. We met first at the home of Katie Miller, I believe, and I have written you some notes about what we discussed. There again, the issue of the Directive was raised once more -- that it had not been solved by the 1977 Forum paper (nor by FLO). Mostly at that meeting everyone was relating what they had found at post, what was going

on and the unhappiness, the lack of coordination and community spirit, and so on. I remember saying, "I think we need to put out a questionnaire, because there's no way you can write a report and really know what people are thinking unless you ask them. Because, there again, you may just be taking the opinion of one small group."

Then we finally realized that we needed professional help in putting this questionnaire together. Kathleen Boswell knew of a man, Mr. Hursh-Cesar, who was a professional, who said he would help us formulate the questions. We needed money, so then we went to the Una Chapman Cox Foundation, which gave us a grant that meant we could have the questionnaire computerized and done professionally. They would also pay for printing the Report.

*Q (Fenzi): As I've told you many times, I think the Report is splendid. But, what was the purpose of the Report ? What was AAFSW trying to do with the Report? Just show how various Foreign Service wives felt?*

LAINGEN: No. I tell you, the reason for the confusion --

*Q (Fenzi): (laughing) I didn't even know there was any confusion.*

LAINGEN: Yes, there was. It began with -- Sue Parsons was president of AAFSW, Sue Low was Forum chairman, Kathleen Boswell and I were co-chairmen of the Spouse Committee. Eventually our group boiled down to these four people meeting, and we met through the whole process of the questionnaire and mailing and so forth. Then Sue Parsons became FLO director, and went out. Kathleen dropped out because of problems she had with Sue Low, as did the pollster, Mr. Hursh-Cesar. That left me and Sue Low.

I had gathered a committee together to write this report. We were going to write up the results of the questionnaire and then make recommendations. Meanwhile, Sue Low had her idea for Foreign Service Associates, and the presidency of AAFSW had changed hands, now in Molly Beyer's hands. Molly had really come in cold, was unsure of all the background. I told Sue Low I felt that our committee should write this report, and one of our recommendations can be "whatever your idea is, of Foreign Service Associates." Sue did not want to do that, saying she couldn't write in a vacuum, and resigned as Forum chairman. I had thought the committee would write the Report and submit it to Sue Low as Forum chairman to revise, etc.

*Q (Fenzi): What vacuum was she writing in? You were giving her a platform.*

*Q (Williamson): That's right. She wanted it to be a separate entity, in other words?*

LAINGEN: She wanted to do it all.

*Q (Fenzi): It would have been much more valid to come out with a proposal based on the findings of this board.*

LAINGEN: But it didn't. Her husband was over at FSI as Director and he was able to help her. Do you have a copy of her report?

*Q (Fenzi): I don't have her report but I have an article --*

LAINGEN: I'll get it for you, then you'll have the whole thing that he helped her print. Plus Betty and Al Atherton helped her. He was Director General then. At any rate, she had her political people lined up, and here I was with my little committee, and no backing as usual. That's my problem. (laughter) So we slugged it out. We had a deadline to get this thing printed.

*Q (Williamson): So you were writing a paper that was a summation --*

LAINGEN: We divided up, into Education, and Community, and Children, and so forth. Everybody wrote a section. Roz Mack did the one on Employment, (and Sue Low was going to help her on that but backed out of that. too). I had worked with the two Sues and Jean German on the Crisis report. That had been very, very difficult, because we all had ideas, but it had to be written a certain way, hammering out details such as commas, etc. as a group, and it's just very difficult to work that way. So I said to each person on my committee, "you and you and you write this and this and this, and then I will polish it all and put it together." That's what we did, and it worked very well. We had no problems whatsoever.

We got to the AAFSW board meeting for review of the Report, however, and Sue Low had brought Betty Atherton and all these folks and they didn't like it because it was "negative", they said. We had put in comments about FLO, for instance, that were negative responses from spouses. I said, "Well, what in the world was the purpose of this anyway if you're not going to take the negative comments from spouses overseas? What point is it?" Well, they wanted it to, kind of, be more balanced, you know. So as a result Molly Beyer was really in a bind between these two forces, and she said, "All right, we'll redo it, we'll go over it again." I thought I was going to faint, having spent 2-1/2 years on this thing. If it hadn't been for Carol Sutherland who came forward and said, "I'll help you," it would not have been finished. (I had had Lesley Dorman and Elspeth Rostow and numerous people on my committee who had computerized the Report, we had gone over it with a fine-toothed comb, proofread it, and so forth ) Yet, to Sue Low and Betty Atherton, it still wasn't the way they wanted it. And Sue was no longer Forum chairman, and Betty was wife of the Director General, both with powerful husbands to back them up!

So Carol and I did it, and we took, I would say, about three months. But in the meantime the presses had stopped and I was very concerned that the State Department would say, "Can't do it now for you, it's too late." It was very touch-and-go, but they did finally print it and sent it overseas everywhere. In the meantime, the head of AAFSW changed again, to Pam Moffat. That was unfortunate because she knew nothing of the background.

Meanwhile Sue Low's Foreign Service Associates had taken on a whole new ascendancy, and when our Report came along I'm sure it was just overloading the circuits of the Department of State. (laughter)

I was so desperate, in the end I threw in a little portion saying we believed the Department should consider something like Foreign Service Associates. You see, I felt we had been overshadowed by the FSA proposal. I don't know the Foreign Service Associates proposal thoroughly but I did attend the big sort of seminar where they discussed, where we broke into various groups - - Career, etc. etc. One of the groups was the wives who must do representation, and compensation issues sort of thing. That is the one aspect, again, which even Sue Low has backed away from because she felt it would destroy the whole rest of her proposal. She wrote an article for Parade Magazine (Fenzi says she has a copy of it) and you will see in it that that is the one issue they're backpedaling now, they're trying to say "we don't really think spouses should be paid for that kind of work."

It's just beyond me how it will ever be solved, really, at this point. Unless ambassadors' wives are just given their freedom to do their own thing. That's the only solution I see now. Because they'll never be paid, I don't believe, because they don't ever want to be back in their husbands' efficiency reports. So the whole spirit that we once knew of partnership and togetherness and the same goals, I don't see it any more.

*Q (Williamson): I don't see it either, Penne. But I do see that they are going to, willy nilly, have to address the issue. Because now that we are at 50% of the Service being single, those jobs of representation, whether it's CODELS, whatever, [with heavy emphasis] still has to be done. Somebody, (laughing) I hate to sound like the cartoon, but somebody's gotta do it.*

LAINGEN: Well, my point is that I feel the wife definitely should NOT do it. Betty Atherton's going to Egypt and having an office in the embassy, and she's still not paid, and she's trying to prove her point. It didn't work. She worked her tail off. But the only answer to making the Department see that it is a viable position or role that should be compensated is for the wives not to do it. (laughing)

*Q (Williamson): I take your point. All I was saying is that I think they're going to have to address it because more and more I found at my last post that I didn't have, essentially, any wives on the post! So they are going to have to address the issue because the issue is there, now, whether they like it or not.*

LAINGEN: Well, I almost wished that Bruce had been appointed to another post, so I could drop out. I was that ugly, that upset by the whole situation.

*Q (Fenzi): I think women have done that.*

*Q (Williamson): Well, I think it also depends upon whatever relationship you have with*

*your husband and his approach. I can remember even back about when the Directive came out or even before, because she'd been doing this before, but I can remember when in Zambia, Ambassador Troxel's wife, had no intention of doing anything about it; as a matter of fact, she was off in Luwanda taking photographs with a crew that was doing a documentary. We were only visitors, when four of us -- Troxel, Wen Coote, Larry and myself -- drove in a car over the Great North Road, 1,000 miles or whatever, from Dar es Salaam to Lusaka. It was a never to be forgotten ride, considered at that point to be Hell's Run. We got back to find that Holly, the ambassador's wife, wasn't there, but it was perfectly understood between Trox and his wife. As long as you come to some agreement that way, that's fine. But it seems to me the basic point is that those functions are still going to have to be carried on whether the Department decides it's going to pay somebody, whether the spouse, the nuns down at the nearest convent who bring in hors d'oeuvres, or whoever...it's going to get to that point.*

*Q (Fenzi): You know who's doing it? This has come up in at least one of our interviews. At this point it's the spouses of the subordinate officers, who are ambitious and want to make brownie points with their husbands' superiors...the next level -- wives of the Political and Economic Officers just below DCM -- are the ones doing it because their husbands are career oriented. You didn't find that?*

*Q (Williamson): Not at all, not at all.*

*Q (Fenzi): One interviewee said that she'd been put upon in that fashion.*

*Q (Williamson): No, no. But again, that is a question of how it comes from the top.*

*Q (Fenzi): Or your relationship with your spouse, too.*

*Q (Williamson): Yes, those are both factors in this situation. But I did not find that at all.*

LAINGEN: So much now, today, depends on the CLO. Neither of us had that, of course. But I feel if that is well organized at post, then there shouldn't be any of these problems, really. Wives should be able to be free to do their own thing.

One of the interesting things arising from the 1985 Spouse Report was that a majority of people at post felt an ambassador's wife should take a leadership role in the community. That really opened my eyes! So they weren't just complaining in a vacuum, they felt these expectations all around them. Their morale was low, because they knew that the majority of people at post think they should behave a certain way despite the Directive. One interesting comment I recall seeing concerned an ambassador whose wife was an officer. She said that if he became an ambassador she would look for another post, because she would never serve as his wife, but he said an ambassador's wife should take a leadership role at post. So, a number of interesting comments came from this questionnaire. Now, five years later, I don't know how useful it's been. I've seen it quoted here and there. But when you get down to really the reality of the situation, no matter how much FLO does,

no matter how many reports we write, the society moves, by itself, in a certain direction.

*Q (Fenzi): And the Foreign Service is part of it. Yet why wasn't the FSA proposal attached to the Report as the recommendation?*

LAINGEN: Well, I don't want to get into the reasons -

*Q (Fenzi): Unless they're just personal, then there's no point in getting into the reason.*

LAINGEN: My theory of why it was is because she [Sue Low] wanted to write her proposal on her own. She didn't want to cooperate --

*Q (Fenzi): Then if it's personal we shouldn't go into it --*

LAINGEN: But I can see no other reason why she dropped out of it. Also, I was adamant that the spouse committee write it; that was the other thing. I didn't want to repeat what we'd gone through in the Crisis Report, where four of us sat around nitpicking about this comma and that comma -- I thought I cannot do that again. Or if you'd have a suggestion, and they'd say "No! That's not the way it's going to be." You know, you feel you're wasting your time. So I set it up where each person wrote her own section and then we got together and someone would say, "where did you get that statistic? Are you sure?" "Absolutely." We backed it up that way. But we did not spend endless hours nitpicking the paper to death. Then, later, Carol Sutherland and I were put on the spot --

*Q (Williamson): What was Carol doing at the time?*

LAINGEN: She was head of the Forum. She had a job downtown so we could use the computer in her office. I just really was deeply grateful to her, because it showed the kind of cooperative, open spirit to make it possible for us to get this done. You see, we had the Cox Foundation grant and were indebted to them, obligated to come out with something. And we also had Mr. Hursh-Cesar's statistical report, which I have, where anyone questioning the statistics could access. We, of course, looked over his report and wrote ours from his. We also made a point in this 1985 report that because so many people had returned their questionnaires with comments that were so well said and pertinent that we decided to use those quotations --

*Q (Williamson): Oh, yes. And I remember being very pleasantly surprised at how many people had responded to the questionnaire, which was far in excess of the normal percentage of returns.*

LAINGEN: Exactly. As I say, I don't know how much is pertinent today. Then on the Cox Foundation money, we also disseminated the Report and questionnaire to AID and USIS spouses, who were very interested in this and gave us a lot of input. CIA spouses weren't allowed to participate -- which caused me to think I wouldn't be a CIA spouse for anything in the world (all three laugh) the way they're treated!



*Q (Williamson): Well, there are compensations, I think.*

LAINGEN: I'm sure there are.

*Q (Williamson): (laughing) I know there are. Financially, certainly.*

*Q (Fenzi): (laughing) I had a question to come back to: The \$30,000 from the Cox Foundation. How was that divided up, how used?*

LAINGEN: Mostly it went to, I threw out the papers later, I can't tell you the percentages, but a great deal went to Mr. Hursh-Cesar for his statistical analysis. Of course there was printing. The Department paid for dissemination of the questionnaire, but the Cox Foundation paid for mailing the report overseas.

*Q (Fenzi): You didn't get a stipend for administering it?*

LAINGEN: Oh, no. The Report came through AAFSW--a volunteer organization.

*Q (Fenzi): A certain portion of the \$30,000 should have been written into the budget for administration. Today, one would just say "my percentage to do this will be such-and-such."*

LAINGEN: No, that never occurred to us, never occurred to us. (laughing) How stupid we were. We didn't, even, ask for travel or expenses or anything.

*Q (Fenzi): Well, maybe we've come that far in five years, but today my first response would be "well, is this going to be enough to pay the administrative costs of-- "*

LAINGEN: Well, I tell you, today I wouldn't do this again. The thing is, it was after the hostage crisis. The homecoming and aftermath was in many ways more difficult than during, if you can believe it -- the adjustments, and what job is Bruce going to get, and I don't want to go overseas. It was really a very stressful, difficult time. When I hear now of people who have been depressed, I realize I went through a terrible depression. I would sit out at the end of Fort McNair and stare at the water. I didn't want to jump in, I wasn't at that point, but I was at such a crossroads of my own life -- what I wanted to do. I did not want the Foreign Service any more, it had mistreated me, used me, maligned me, taken my husband overseas and put him in danger, hadn't supported me.

*Q (Williamson): You'd had it.*

LAINGEN: And then here was Bruce not knowing -- he was talking of running for the Senate, I didn't want him to, I thought that was a terrible idea. It was just an awful time. So I sort of grabbed onto this project as something to do, really, just to get it off my chest. And find out if I was the only one, or were there others. It was kind of therapy for me.

Today, since Bruce has retired, and I am able to do my own thing, I'm almost callous, now, but happy.

In the beginning when I went into this period of assessment about spouses in the Foreign Service, even in that first meeting with Macomber, we found that everybody was unhappy: the singles were unhappy ; the senior wives were overbearing; the junior wives were unhappy. So here it was, a lot later, 1988, I think. Bruce had just retired, and I got a call from Marguerite Cooper. I could have died laughing! She's just been given an award of some money for something that she did. So she's all excited and is organizing this group of Foreign Service families. "I want you to be on the Board," she said. "You know, it's just really fantastic what we have found. The singles are unhappy, the older wives are overbearing, the junior wives are unhappy -- " (they all break up, hilarious) And I said, "THANK YOU, NO, MARGUERITE." (more laughter)

*Q (Fenzi): "I've just run full circle."*

LAINGEN: Isn't it incredible? That was in 1971, and here she's calling me in 1988. And I said, "You're on your own, kiddo. Because I have had it, from sticking my head out in 1978 and 1985." So that is the saga. And I've got all this printed stuff for your files.

*Q (Fenzi): I first met you in the midst of all that turmoil, and not having known any of the history, I have to be very frank with you. There were times I would think, well, where are you coming from? Now that I know a great deal more about the history of all of this, I can see your frustration at that time.*

*Q (Williamson): At each juncture.*

LAINGEN: There was talk that, first of all, they would psychoanalyze the hostages and their families and counsel them and help them and so forth. That was very sparse. Eventually for some reason the Department totally dropped all the analysis of the hostage crisis, the psychological -- they were going to do some sort of study of the families and see how they'd turned out and follow us. You know, after the Vietnam War, for years the POWs were taking physicals and being observed. Once a year they automatically went to their medical facilities and were examined physically and psychologically.

So here we were, a group of real good guinea pigs, and they were going to do the same. I believe it was the change of administration, that Reagan wanted to sweep the hostage situation under the rug and totally forget it. I'll never forget, when we went to the Department where all the hostages were to receive the Medal of Valor, they were seated on the stage. General Haig entered and said, "Here, Bruce, you come over here, I'll give you your Medal, the rest of you can pick up your Medal in Room 1708." (gasps from F and W) It was that callous.

*Q (Williamson): (exhaling strong breath) -- it's outrageous.*

LAINGEN: It was, it was absolutely outrageous, but that is what happened. I think if you were to interview people like Marian Precht, wife of FSO Henry Precht, who had been working on the Iran Task Force, you would see that this group had set up all the plans for the Homecoming. After Reagan won the election, however, the plans were totally upset by the new people who came in. They weren't going to do this, or that --

*Q (Williamson): What were the changes?*

LAINGEN: If Jimmy Carter had still been in the White House, I think there would have been tremendous celebrations in the White House -- a big dinner party, or who knows, but it would have gone on and on, I'm sure. There would have been better career possibilities for the hostages. Reagan wanted to just get them in -- we did have a big tea party at the White House.

*Q (Williamson): Wasn't there a procession from Union Station or somewhere?*

LAINGEN: Oh, yes, from Andrews Air Force Base. We flew in from West Point. That was absolutely fantastic. Bruce and I were on the bus with George and Barbara Bush, they were our escorts. And the bus window had that very dark glass that prevents those outside from seeing in. Bruce asked Mrs. Bush for some lipstick and wrote a big THANK YOU and put it up against the window. A few weeks later we got the sign in the mail from Barbara Bush, saying, "I thought you'd want this for your scrapbook."

Well, the homecoming was fine, but it was definitely changed by the new administration's desire to have it over with, let's be done with this. Anyway, I think that had to do with the State Department's later decision not to pursue us any further on lessons learned. I thought, even though there were many things the Department did right by us families, there was still a lot they should know they should not have done.

*Q (Williamson): Well, one can always learn from any situation.*

LAINGEN: Well, one would think so, but they were not interested in what we spouses or family members had to say. Until along comes Jean German, and I think this is a fantastic woman because she was the first one to say to me, "I want to hear what you have to say." At that time she was in AAFSW, and we wrote the Crisis Report, which would not have come about without Jean German. Because she and Fanchon Silberstein, who was head of the OBC at that time, those two saw that there was much to be learned. Eventually Jean became the deputy to Fanchon at OBC, and called in Wallapa Tomseth and Marge German and various wives to sit down and talk about the crisis, how it was handled for the families.

*Q (Williamson): Excuse me, Penne, wasn't Ginny Taylor the first crisis counselor, or whatever we call it in FLO now -- her first job in FLO, if I remember correctly, was head of Crises -- what did we call it? It had a different title.*

LAINGEN: She was, but you see the thing was, FLO became a part of State Department, under Management. Therefore Ginny was very much a part of that. She was with us all through the hostage crisis, but Marian Precht was head of this Iran Working Group (IWG). (FLO was told not to interfere in the IWG's work, so Ginny Taylor did not handle us directly. This was done by volunteer spouses. I don't know if you want me to go into that phase...

*Q (Fenzi): I think that Joan and I having been CLOs, can appreciate Ginny's position. She had to work with Management.*

LAINGEN: Oh, you do.

*Q (Fenzi): She had to keep her channels open to the --*

*Q (Williamson): Of course. I was only trying to gain perspective on when Ginny was, as was my understanding, the first one in an established crisis position whatever they were calling it -- trying to pin down the year in relation to our discussion.*

LAINGEN: What I'm saying is that she was long gone by the time the crisis was over. Therefore, she was not in OBC; that was Jean German and Fanchon Silberstein. To resume, the State Department did not want to hear what we had to say. It was only when Jean and Fanchon saw that they might learn from us, that they called us in saying, "Let's write a Crisis Report". That's how that came about.

*Q (Fenzi): Did they then turn that over to FLO?*

LAINGEN: Well yes, they gave it to the Department, and on that particularly their criticism of the Medical Division. Medical was very unhappy with the comments and for a long time sat on their papers. Eventually in the Crisis Report I think we kind of softened that part of it down because they were very upset by some of the recommendations. I have never known -- you'll have to ask Sue Low or Sue Parsons -- what happened to the Crisis Report recommendations. Whether FLO incorporated them and pushed them -- probably so, because Sue Parsons was then in, but I never knew what became of that report.

Meanwhile, Jean German became head of OBC and was very much interested in new programs on the handling of families in crisis. She had me write a report, called "Living in a Stressful World." I'll give you a copy for your files, and also these letters which you can photocopy, which I think go along with it. They're saying, to give one example: "Congratulations on a fine and monumental piece of work. I want you to know that even though I was reading it as an editor, it held my interest throughout. I learned a lot. You are providing important information and support for your reader." That was signed "Sarah." And a letter from overseas, John Spitzer, in AID: "One of our employees stationed in Yemen recently told me that the FLO mailing on "Parenting in a Stressful World" had reached them just before the embassy communicator was shot last month. He went on to say how helpful it had been to the parents in Sanaa. Apparently, the children in

Yemen exhibited many of the same behavior changes covered in the article. The parents, however, knew what symptoms to look for and how to react to these emerging patterns."

*Q (Williamson): Oh, terrific.*

LAINGEN: There was another one, something from Marcia Curran. I think it's very interesting that that report was a success. Then I did a few other things for Marilyn Holmes, in her video, on the handling of families in crisis situations. I do believe that OBC has a better handle on it now than the State Department. I did hear through the years from various hostage families, who say, "Well, the Department calls us, but they're so callous," they're so this, or that. We heard it with the PanAm 103 families and the Beirut hostage families, how the State Department would say, "We've got your child's body here. Come down and get it." They were so callous.

Now, with this latest crisis in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, I saw the other day they've got, I believe, 40 people telephoning every day 3,000 family members. It's an incredible task. I said to Bruce, I wonder if I should volunteer and go down and talk to these folks. Because when you've had an experience, you are more valuable than people who have not.

*Q (Fenzi): Sure. You're more in tune to their feelings.*

LAINGEN: Then I thought, no, I won't do that (half-apologetic laugh). Well, I would if they called me. But to just volunteer, I don't think they really want the spouses to come in any more. Betty Atherton did it, but... my feeling is they just would rather bumble along the way they do it.

*Q (Fenzi): But you know we've come a long way. Here again, to fall back on one of our interviews, I don't remember when the crisis in Santo Domingo was, it must have been either late 1950s or early 60s, but the ambassador's wife left when there was "a crisis." It occurred to her later that maybe she should have done something about the staff, but her rationale was that you don't rock the Department's boat. So she came home and just left the families there. During her interview, she said, "You know, one thing I did do." She had seen Louisa Kennedy on television. "I invited her to tea because I wanted to know what went on in her mind that made that group realize something should be done to help these people." So we've come a long way in the last 25-30 years.*

LAINGEN: Well, I'm not so sure we have come a long way.

*Q (Fenzi): But her reaction, Penne, was that you didn't do anything about a crisis because you didn't want to confront State Department tradition. And that's not all that long ago.*

LAINGEN: Oh, well, I see -- you mean we've come a long way in rocking the boat.

*Q (Fenzi): Yes.*

LAINGEN: Could be. But you know yourself, the generation or two before ours, the Cabots and their ilk, didn't think of the State Department as at all a social organization to take care of everybody.

*Q (Fenzi): Oh, no, of course not.*

LAINGEN: In fact, (laughing) they hardly got paid, some of them.

*Q (Fenzi): See, they didn't need the salary, they didn't need a support system, because they were quite accustomed to taking care of themselves financially. And traveling -- they were sophisticated before they ever got to the State Department.*

LAINGEN: But what worries me today is that instead of becoming more caring, we really are becoming less caring. We are becoming media conscious, so that we have all these videos that we show and this and that. But the personal hands-on contacts, I wonder.

*Q (Williamson): But doesn't that reflect society in general?*

LAINGEN: It does, exactly, sure.

*Q (Fenzi): And that's because there are more people.*

*Q (Williamson): Not necessarily. I don't think it's ipso facto because there's more people, I think that just in general it seems to me it's partly a carry over from this whole period of either what's in it for me or I've got mine. I'm deliberately staying away from calling it the me generation as such. But this whole emphasis on I've got mine.*

LAINGEN: Speaking of that, when I got back from Malta I went to a career counseling course, not because I was going to start a career, but because I really wanted to know what was going on with women and listen to the attitudes in the Service. I've put that in the Georgetown Symposium essay. My reaction was that the State Department was financing this woman to come in and tell you how to get a career to get you away from the Foreign Service, and it seemed to me that it was kind of ludicrous that the Department would pay for teaching women how to break away, instead of bringing you back, finding ways to recall your sense of allegiance.

Anyway, this one exercise I will never forget. The teacher said, "Now," and she drew a big rectangle on the blackboard, "this is your conference table, this is your life, and I want you to put around this conference table your board of directors, who runs your meetings, who runs your life." So I immediately went right to work. "That's easy." I put my husband at one end and his career at the other. (laughter) And then I put my three sons on the side, and my parents and my activities were on the other side, as well as the pets and all the obligations I had to the church, and whatever.

The teacher came by my desk and whipped it off like I was perfectly made for her. She took my exercise to the blackboard. "Now you see how your life is totally run by everybody but you," she said. "My rectangle is here and at the end I have a tremendous circle and I am at the head of the table. And that's all there is." I remember being just devastated, going home, and realizing I was not in control of my life at all. I said, "that's my life, I'm lying right there on the middle of that table." (laughing) You can see the tremendous psychological upheaval that I have gone through just being called a sadomasochist and that I want to victimize junior wives.

*Q (Williamson): Well, it all came at one time, Penne. It was a one-two punch. You'd come back from Malta, then with all this business with Bruce, with the hostage situation, it was all as if you were got in the ring and were going to ten rounds, and about the fifth round you realized (she laughs) "what on earth am I doing here and how do I get out of here?"*

LAINGEN: And you can imagine, I mean, to look at the Directive that says "you're free to be your own person." I mean, they've got to be kidding, they've got to be!" Now, maybe neither of you had that experience, I don't know.

*Q (Williamson): Which experience? (hearty laughs)*

LAINGEN: I mean the psychological. Maybe some people do feel free to be the "me" at the head of the conference table, but I don't frankly think, Foreign Service or not, that any of us can go through life totally without some other things coming into it. I mean, if you have children, don't they figure somewhat?

*Q (Williamson): I must say I have seen, for lack of a more convenient word, I've seen some totally selfish spouses in the last seven, eight, ten years in the Foreign Service. Totally. And they would conform to your feeling -- no, the only thing was they did have a little regret on leaving post because it would mean that they wouldn't get to travel quite as much. But they hadn't been on post anyway because they were too busy doing their job back here with their separate allowance.*

LAINGEN: Well, of course, I think we forget the men in this situation.

*Q (Williamson): In what way?*

LAINGEN: Well, some women who want to be their own person are demanding that the men pitch in, let's say, with the housekeeping and child care. I'm not saying they shouldn't, but it tends to make men look like they've been totally self-centered, totally selfish, when really, men are not. Men have had all the responsibility, not only for their career but for their families -- the financial care of the family, and many men take care of the garden, of the car, the furnace. I mean, I don't see why mopping the floor, let's say, (it's a job that nobody likes) but -- how shall I say this? -- I don't think men have been as selfish as women have made them out to be.

*Q (Williamson): Well, that's been this whole problem with this whole feminist movement and why the pendulum continues to swing back and forth. It seems to me there was an over reaction, there was a stridency and too strong a position taken in the beginning which has caused, in our society in general, people to draw back to a certain degree, or at least reexamine the positions that were taken in the forefront of this feminist movement or the "now" or whatever you want to call it.*

LAINGEN: And the pitiable part is a perception that women who want to take care of their children or stay home is a "stupid thing to do."

*Q (Williamson): It's perceived as worthless because no financial value is placed on it.*

LAINGEN: The power of the paycheck.

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BIOGRAPHICAL DATA:

Spouse: Lowell Bruce Laingen

Spouse's Position: AEP, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State

Spouse Entered Service: 1949

Left Service: 1987

You Entered Service: 1957

Left Service: Same

Status: Spouse of Retiree

Posts:

1957-60	Washington, DC, Greek Desk Officer
1960-64	Karachi, Pakistan, Political Officer
1964-66	Washington, DC, Desk Officer Pakistan/Afghanistan
1967-68	Washington, DC, National War College
1968-71	Kabul, Afghanistan, DCM
1971-74	Washington, DC, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near East/South Asia
1974-76	Washington, DC, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs
1977-79	Valetta, Mafia, AEP
1979-81	Tehran, Iran, chargé d'affaires and hostage (Family in U.S.)
1981-86	Washington, DC, Vice President, National Defense University

Place/Date of birth: Ann Arbor, Michigan, December 1, 1931

Maiden Name: Penelope Lippitt Babcock

Parents:

Frederick Morrison Babcock, Founder, Federal Housing Administration



Margaret Shippen Babcock

Schools:

1949            Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School  
1949-52        Randolph Macon  
1953            George Washington University, BA

Profession: Research Analyst, FBI; FS wife par excellence; Freelance writer

Date/Place of Marriage: June 1, 1957, Chevy Chase, MD - All Saints Episcopal

Children:

William Bruce Laingen  
Lt. Charles Winslow Laingen  
James Palmer Laingen

Honors:

1978    Benefactress of Mafia  
1982    Mortar Board Leadership Award  
1983    Seabury -Western Theological Seminary Distinguished Christian Service Medal  
1987    Nominated Washington Woman of the Year

Positions held:

At Post:

Karachi, Pakistan

- \* Taught sewing to orphans
- \* Fund raiser for orphanage
- \* Editor of American Woman's Club Newsletter "The Camel Bell"
- \* Author of embassy musical
- \* Member of Woman's Club Craft Show
- \* Judge at Ghandi Gardens Flower Show
- \* Organizer of American Craft Show, USIA
- \* Decoration Chairman of Fund Raising Ball
- \* Co-Chairman of Cathedral Bazaar

Kabul, Afghanistan

- \* Manager of American Woman's Club Gift Shop, which trained and guided over 100 Afghan craftsmen
- \* Chairman of American
- \* Woman's Club Stall at annual International Fair
- \* Organizer of USIA Art Exhibit at DCM's residence and contributor
- \* Candy Striper at Avicenna Hospital
- \* Cub Scout mother
- \* PTA member
- \* Writer of American Woman's Club

- \* Skit to raise money for Afghan School in Istalif
- \* Participant in Gilbert and Sullivan "Trial By Jury" of British Council
- \* Member of Ambassador's Wife Country Team, Protocol Chairman
- \* Organizer of children's program for Afghan Jeshyn Parade for the Queen
- \* Member of American Woman's Club
- \* Speaker at Graduation of Servant Hygiene School

Valetta, Malta:

- \* Chairman of Newman Club programs
- \* PTA member at De La Salle Christian Brothers School
- \* Chairman of Games Night to raise money for the National Trust to restore an ancient church
- \* Organizer of two concerts, art exhibit, and various programs at the American embassy residence
- \* Chairman of American Stall for Handicapped Bazaar
- \* Member of Ikebana International
- \* Honorary President of American Woman's Club
- \* Teacher of typing to American children
- \* Organizer of Square Dance Group of Americans and Maltese
- \* Participant in American Art Show at DCM's residence
- \* Member of Maltese President's August Moon Ball Committee
- \* Organizer of embassy Town Meetings
- \* Honorary member of Maltese-Gozitan Society
- \* Honorary Member of Maltese-American Society
- \* Hostess of American Residence in Malta for a myriad of representational functions

In Washington, DC:

- \* Red Cross Driver
- \* AAFSW member and officer
- \* Participant in AAFSW Cathedral Flower Mart Stall
- \* Member of Board, PTA
- \* Worker in church thrift shop
- \* Chairman of fund raising activities for Radnor School
- \* Member of National War College Woman's Club
- \* Founder of Family Liaison Action Group (FLAG) for families of American hostages in Iran
- \* Editor of FLAG Bulletin
- \* Founder of the Yellow Ribbon Campaign
- \* Member of No Greater Love Philanthropic Organization and National Organization of Victim Assistance
- \* 1982 Alternate Recording Secretary AAFSW
- \* 1983 Recording Secretary AAFSW
- \* 1982-83 Contributor to AAFSW Forum Report on Families in Crisis
- \* 1983-85 Chairman of Role of the Spouse in the Foreign Service Forum Committee, AAFSW

- \* 1985 Writer of Report, The Role of the Spouse in the Foreign Service
- \* 1981 Contributor to Written Symposium, "Diplomacy: the Role of the Wife," Institute of Diplomatic Studies
- \* 1986 Chairman of AAFSW Think Tank Committee
- \* 1984 Reviser of AAFSW Archives
- \* March 1987 Participant in Conference "The Human Side of Terrorism,"
- \* 1986 Author of Report "Living in a Stressful World" for OBC
- \* Contributor to "Manuscripts" magazine and other articles
- \* Contributor to annual church bazaar
- \* 1987-88 Interviewer and transcriber for the Foreign Service Family Oral History Project

*End of interview*