

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

ALICE PICKERING

*Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi and Priscilla Becker
Initial interview date: September 20, 1991*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Mrs. Pickering was a Foreign Service Officer (USIS) in the Hague, Netherlands when she resigned to marry Thomas R. Pickering. He subsequently joined the State Department Foreign Service, and Mrs. Pickering accompanied him on his assignments in the United States and abroad.

Background

Born and raised in Pennsylvania
Swarthmore College; Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and Catholic
University
Entered the Foreign Service (USIS) in 1954
Degree in Library Science

| | |
|---|-----------|
| The Hague, the Netherlands: USIA Officer Marriage to Thomas Pickering | 1954-1955 |
| Resignation from the Foreign Service Reasons for resignation Possibility of reinstatement as FSO | 1955 |
| Accompanying husband | 1955-1959 |
| Washington, DC: Spouse of INR Officer | 1959-1962 |
| Geneva, Switzerland: Spouse of Political Officer Life as spouse with children Consideration given by senior wives | 1962-1964 |
| Washington, DC: Spouse of Foreign Service Officer Study of Library Science | 1964-1965 |
| Zanzibar: Spouse of Consul Anti-American sentiment | 1965-1967 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling of isolation Foreign community Children's education | |
| Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Spouse of Deputy Chief of Mission: | 1967-1969 |
| Washington, DC: Spouse of Deputy Office Director Study of Library Science | 1969-1973 |
| Amman, Jordan: Spouse of Ambassador <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inadequate Housing Kissinger and VIP visitors American Women's Clubs Staff and dependents morale issues Community Liaison Office (CLO) Archaeology Regional travel (auto) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arabian Peninsula Zanzibar | 1974-1978 |
| Washington, DC Spouse of Assistant Secretary of State Professional Librarian, Fairfax County | 1978-1981 |
| Lagos, Nigeria: Spouse of Ambassador <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travel to Sahara <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparations and equipment Travel group Post-travel "Road Show" | 1981-1983 |
| San Salvador, El Salvador <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Security Death threats Environment Residence becomes VIP "hotel" Mental Health program Embassy (officers) protocol memorandum Embassy workload Elections Officer morale Security American Women's Club Schooling Regional travel | 1983-1985 |
| Tel Aviv, Israel: Spouse of Ambassador | 1985-1989 |

- Heavy entertaining
- Housing
- Demands on wives at post
- Learning labor negotiations
- Lack of Embassy “togetherness”
- Community Liaison Officer (CLO) position
- Archaeological sites
- Travel to Egypt
 - Telephoning Washington

New York City, New York: Spouse of US Ambassador to UN

- Notice of assignment
- Lack of compensation normally supplied abroad 1989-
- Housing costs
- Representation responsibilities
- New York City environment
- Living at the Waldorf
- Volunteering
- Satisfaction from work and responsibilities

General Comments

- Provisions of 1972 directive
- Lack of involvement by current dependent wives
- Congressional visitors “handling”
- Representation responsibilities of officers and wives
- Lack of pre-post instruction for spouses and FS personnel
- Payment to spouses for services at mission
- Danger and terrorism threats abroad
- Effect of instant international communication (TV, etc)
- Importance of counseling and training of new wives in FS
- Volunteer work
- Reporting as taxable “gifts”, free travel with husband
- Classification as “non-employees”
- Reforming the 1972 Directive
- Family Liaison Office (FLO) operations
 - Role of spouses abroad
 - Household allowance discrimination
 - Spouse employment initiatives
- Canadian proposal for spouse compensation
- Foreign Service Associates (FSA) proposal
- Lack of staff response to official invitations

INTERVIEW

A STATEMENT by Alice Pickering

Recorded on Friday, September 20, 1991, by Jewell Fenzi and Priscilla Becker at the Residence of the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, on the forty-second floor of the Waldorf Towers in New York City.

PICKERING: Everybody's Foreign Service career is very different. I think that I with my husband have had an interesting variety of experiences and I rather wanted to summarize them before I started talking about New York and the UN.

The ironic part is that our very first post in the Foreign Service was in Geneva, with the USUN Mission there, for a very special conference on disarmament. My husband was assigned to Geneva to the 18-nation Disarmament Conference in 1962 that negotiated the first nuclear test ban treaty. Our present post, which will probably be our last, is also with the UN in New York. So we started and will end in a situation with the UN, which we never expected.

I had been a USIS Officer in the Department and in The Hague, and when I was married in The Hague, I thought I had to resign. I think this is why I have been so aware of the spouse's problems, the legal problems of women who are not officers in the Foreign Service, because I suffered at the beginning and I've suffered all the way through as a spouse. When I joined the U.S. Information Agency and then decided to marry the next year, it was just absolutely assumed that one had to resign upon marriage.

Now, presumably, I suppose my husband could have resigned, I mean one of us could stay in. I guess there was always that knowledge. But the assumption was that you couldn't both stay in. So I resigned and made my decision and felt, well, at least my husband was in the Foreign Service and this would be something that I wanted to do. I think I had a special advantage in that because it was something that I personally had studied for, had the same training as my husband and I didn't enter as some wives do with absolutely no interest or knowledge about the world or wanting to travel. I must say that I think it's given me a different perspective. But at the same time I've been acutely aware as a result of that, too, of all the problems a spouse has as opposed to a woman officer in our service.

It was not until 1972, that I could have been reinstated. I must say that when the resignations were challenged, the Department did come around -- at some point I got information that I could be reinstated if we had resigned on that basis. However, your reinstatement was exactly as you left. I had only been in one year, as a junior officer, and hadn't of course gotten a promotion yet. The possibility of reinstatement was the same year that my husband was getting his first ambassadorship. I thought that was going to be very difficult, not only to find in a very small mission a job that wouldn't conflict but I would be the junior member on the team. (she laughs) So I chose not to reinstate myself.

It was fair, and I could have done so. And I knew some other women who did it. I want to observe, though, that the ambassador's wife and the DCM's and consul general's wife, or any people in the senior positions, still have a difficult if not impossible problem of being able to work in an embassy or even another related agency such as USIS or AID. It has been done, I know, but I also think the Department still actively discourages it. And they say so. In my own mind, I know why, because I think that within the embassy community itself overseas, it is never understood. Even if the spouse is eminently qualified and has worked in special areas before, it's always interpreted as nepotism, which I think is too bad. But I think as a senior wife I have to recognize it. Even as a spouse with no employment in the mission, I have always to be very careful, because what I say or do is often misinterpreted.

I've come to recognize that's a human problem that probably the Department itself cannot ever solve. But I don't think they should continue to actively discourage it or to say "you cannot work." I know that in the case of the CLOs overseas, it's almost always said: the DCM's wife should not apply. I think that's very unfair, though maybe the ambassador's wife shouldn't but certainly other levels should be able to.

Back to what I said about some unusual aspects of my life as a spouse in the service. My husband and I spent most of our time in the underdeveloped world, at smaller missions, and I include the Middle East as underdeveloped in that sense as opposed to the larger European or Asian missions. So a lot of what I have to say really is colored by that, I think. It does make a difference what type and size of community you're living in.

Geneva wasn't large because we were with UN Disarmament Mission, perhaps 100 people. So it's always been small posts for us, and therefore we've been more associated -- certainly before and after '72 -- with close communities of people who were in hardship places and had to depend more on one another. I think that certainly has affected how I look at the service now and all the way along, because we were in situations where it was important that the community stay together. It was our only support group.

Another thing that colors what I have to say is that with the exception of Geneva, I've always been the senior wife. I think that's rather unusual, but my husband's next job was as Consul in Zanzibar, which had become Tanzania the year before we arrived. It was a four-man consulate but nevertheless I was the senior wife. In Dar es Salaam, when my husband was DCM, our ambassador was not married, therefore I always had to serve for him. We liked him very much so I didn't consider it too onerous although sometimes it was difficult to be hostess for somebody not your husband. And from then on, every time I received official guests my husband was ambassador. There again, I think this affects my viewpoint and maybe isn't fairly reflective of a lot of other people who've come up and have had very different experiences.

I was very worried when we went to Geneva because we'd been in Washington for three years without a promotion. We had been overseas when he was in the Navy, in Morocco. I had lived in The Hague, we had lived in Morocco, Geneva was our first post as Foreign

Service. We had spent the three years in Washington, in INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research], and my husband hadn't been promoted. We went by ship, and I remember saying to him on ship, "Well, where do you think we'll be ten years from now?" We were certainly the most junior member of that delegation in Geneva. You know, (laughing) you sometimes start slowly. Maybe as a result of this early experience, but even in Geneva and certainly in Washington, I think I represented an intermediate group of foreign service wives. I never suffered from an arrogant ambassador's wife who demanded things that were really excessive. I had some friends who were slightly older than me who'd had these experiences; and there were only a few "dragon ladies" as we called them.

I feel very strongly that my generation, as we were entering in the late 50s and 60s, would never ever have even considered, when we contemplated becoming senior wives, asking that kind of subservience or the type of thing we heard about. I personally never experienced it. My senior wives, especially in Geneva when I was a very junior person, were most considerate. When I had small children I was never asked to bring food; if I were, I always considered it a great privilege because it was a learning experience and I look on it that way because I was considered part of the team and I felt this was an opportunity for me to observe and learn.

I think unfortunately the younger people now don't look on it that way, and therefore they don't learn and end up sometimes in situations where they should have known better. Now junior officers don't look on the kind of relationships they have within the embassy as this kind of experience. So I speak from a past generation but I think we were already making a transition well before 1972; and '72 represented a reaction to, typically, 25 years before.

Another thing I want to mention as background to everything I say is that my husband has unintentionally ended up being multi-functional. We volunteered to go to Africa in the 60s, partly because we were "stuck" in Washington for three years and thought the new posts opening in Africa offered an opportunity. We volunteered but didn't hear anything for some time; we went off to Geneva. Suddenly toward the end of our tour there, we got a cable assigning him to Swahili language training and we would go to Lubumbashi in Zaire.

Fine. That's what we'd said we wanted to do except we'd forgotten about it after so long. And a very senior and famous ambassador at our conference, Ambassador Jacob Beam, came into my husband's office saying, "Tom, Tom, how can you do this? If you want to get out of this assignment, I'll get you assigned to something in Europe." It was still a very Europe-centered service, I believe. My husband was very flattered and came home and we talked about it. We decided that we indeed wanted to go off to the developing world, to the new posts that were opening up. We thought it was a great opportunity -- not just for personal aggrandizement but just to contribute, because my husband's level in a huge European mission would have been as vice consul.

So we went off and started to become specialists in the African world. We thought that

would be the future, and we quite enjoyed that and looked forward to working in that area. Along the way many things happened. We were not very prescient, because during our first long leave from Zanzibar, in Athens -- in those days you weren't brought back to the United States, you were given an R&R post -- with about five weeks and two little kids, we decided we would never see the Middle East, and here we were so close, we'd better take our time and money on a trip. So we went all over the Middle East because we were quite assured we'd never end up there!

As I say, we didn't have much foresight. Anyhow, his career has gone from many parts of the world he wasn't especially prepared for. His time in the Department as an assistant secretary was with something nobody had ever heard of before: Oceans, Environment, Science and Technology. This turned out to be one of the most interesting times in our whole career as we made friends with people such as the president of the National Academy of Science, who was then the President's Science Adviser, and with people in many academic institutions who opened our eyes to many things.

So we've had this sort of wide-ranging experience in the service, including consular experience, that I think gave me a wider perspective, perhaps, than among people who've spent an entire career in just one part of the world because of language choices and so forth.

I don't know if you want me to focus on each country or -- I'm just speaking overall from all these experiences. Let me speak about Jordan because that was my husband's first experience as ambassador, and I think that point is a very crucial one in anyone's life as to how you look at the service. It changes perspective.

I went to Jordan about two years after the '72 Directive to women, in early January 1974. The Directive, by the way, was issued under Mr. Macomber, the Under Secretary for Management, who had been one of our predecessors in Jordan many years before, in the late 40s as ambassador. He was a bachelor then, and one of the first things I learned when I went to Jordan, where we had a very small, unpretentious house, was that most housing in the Middle East at that time was far less lavish than the houses we'd had in Africa, which were ex-colonial and where the type of living there lent itself to large houses before air-conditioning existed. To tell you the truth, the nicest house we ever lived in was when my husband was DCM in Tanzania, a beautiful house.

We went to Jordan to a much smaller, not very easily manageable house. Everybody kept saying we must find another house. We tried very hard to do some kind of an exchange, tramped over every hillside in Jordan, and finally came down to some real possibilities. By the way, recalling history, this was just after the 1973 Israeli-Egyptian war. Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State and all the disengagement agreements were in operation. Every month Henry Kissinger, Roy Atherton, Joseph Sisco, all the team from the Department's top level to carry out the disengagement, would descend on us.

We truly did need more space than our house provided, we thought. When we got what I

thought was a perfectly great agreement on a new house, word suddenly came down from Under Secretary Macomber that he had lived in that house in Jordan as ambassador -- as I said, in the late 40s or early 50s -- and it had been perfectly adequate for him. He neglected to say he was a bachelor then and obviously without any children. Therefore, as far as he was concerned, that would always remain as the house for the American Ambassador in Jordan. This was a lesson (she laughs) in real politik of the State Department for me.

In any case, I think I learned a lot from that experience and others in Jordan that stood me in good stead later on. Two important things I learned. First of all, there was an American Women's Club in Jordan, about 250 women, and I am always invited [in] most countries to be the honorary president of the American Women's Clubs and always accepted. I never felt I should run the club but I always participated, and I was very happy to do so there because a lot of the American women were married to Jordanians. They needed a support group. We learned from them a lot of things about Jordan. That I thought was very important.

One of the early mistakes I made, inadvertently. I had been there for two years, there was an election for president, and I had been sitting on the board. In the negotiations for a new president, there was some conflict, people thought I had taken sides; I felt I hadn't. The problem was solved later but I learned that I should never sit on the board and vote or participate. I made it clear from then on, and it was a lesson I learned well, to say I would support whoever was elected and whatever the board wanted to do, with one exception -- and I think this is important in terms of volunteerism -- I decided that I would participate on the committee that most of these groups have for giving money to charity. There is usually a committee that disburses the monies that they raise, which most groups do. I thought it was important from the embassy's side to make sure we knew where that money was going. I often was able to find out about the recipient organizations and their legitimacy and I always insisted, and participated, in visiting any organization that we might be giving money to and to be part of that group which was non-controversial. Therefore I also personally had the opportunity to learn so much about the country. I found that was the way I could get out without my husband with a group of women and specially visit all kinds of organizations I would never have had access to see otherwise. I often found that very rewarding in all the American groups up to and including Tel Aviv.

The second thing I learned in Jordan that continued in later posts was the issue of morale within the embassy. My husband and I have always taken that very seriously. In fact, the Department charges the ambassador (and wife) to be responsible for the morale at post. This becomes more and more difficult in situations everywhere today, which I discovered in Jordan after two years, when we returned from home leave.

Since it was a two-year post, when we returned there was a new political officer and his wife, a new public affairs officer, a new political counselor and wife -- a lot of changes, yet we had only been gone about six weeks. In our absence the chargé's wife, French-born, had returned to France, so neither she nor I were there. I came back to find

"everything" had changed in the mission. Some of the new people were very unhappy, they were demanding all sorts of things from the mission that hadn't been done before. So we had a meeting of all the wives -- there was no American Embassy women's group, it was part of the larger group. I called everybody together and we started talking.

One woman said that no one had received them when they arrived. I said, "But I wasn't here, you must really have known the Ambassador and his wife were on leave and that the DCM/chargé's wife was also not here." Well yes, she realized we weren't there but nevertheless she'd never been invited to the house. It was totally irrational on her part but I suddenly realized the importance of something I am still trying to pursue in New York: that the first two weeks, three weeks, one month maximum, that people are at a post is the most important time that you have to help these people integrate into the culture, the country, the embassy, whatever they're a part of. And I've tried my best since then to make sure that there is a CLO -- by the way, this was just at the beginning of the CLO program. In fact Jordan, also as a result of my experience, received one of the first CLOs. As soon as the inquiry came out asking which posts wanted a CLO, we sent a cable back the next day saying we did, because I recognized the importance of it and that it was an increasingly difficult problem for senior wives to handle.

I've always participated with the CLO on orientation programs, how they're set up, offering any experience or help that I can on the programs of orientation and greeting newcomers. I consider it the most important part of the mission's contribution to morale, particularly for the spouses and families of employees. Since I came to New York and realized that no program like that had ever existed, certainly not in recent years, we've been trying to revive that. It does make a difference in how people feel toward being part of a mission, even a large one like New York, which probably resembles many of the big European embassies where you don't spend a lot of time together.

So Jordan in many ways was a valuable learning experience for me. It helped me to avoid mistakes later on and helped me look toward what could be done. I discovered early on that it is essential to find something interesting to you as a person in order to keep up your own morale. A senior wife can be lonelier than many others. It's difficult to make friends because it's not often looked at in the way you'd like it. There might be a person whom I'd like very much but she might be the deputy political counselor's wife. No matter what one does, people notice whom you spend time with and petty jealousies can develop. It's very difficult, and sometimes the senior wife can have a lot of problems, emotional and every other kind, because she can be the loneliest person in the mission. So I have found that for a senior wife -- and I don't mean just the ambassador's wife but any level, really -- you must try hard to find friends, either of course in the community in which you're dealing, or with diplomatic colleagues, and to find your own resources even if you're not in a work situation.

For me Jordan was wonderful also because it opened my eyes to archeology. I took courses through the American Center of Oriental Research and I'm proud to say that just this year I've been named to the board of trustees of the over-all American organization

that will be working with the Center in Jordan. So that has continued as a lifelong interest for me. My husband and I spent time every weekend visiting archeological sites, and that again was important for us because we discovered that sometimes it's very hard to have a private life, a personal life. I've always felt that in order for him, or if a woman officer, for her, to do a job well, you also have to develop your personal life and interests. We were able to do that in every place we've been because we were interested in travel and history and archeology which you can find anywhere in the world.

So I use Jordan as an example because at every stage in one's career in one's position you have to learn from it and, hopefully, adapt it to very different situations where you are. I've thought a lot about that.

I participated whenever I could, including in Washington. I work when I'm in the U.S. and consider myself a professional totally apart from the Foreign Service. Early on in our career, when we were in Africa with young children, a colleague of ours died in West Africa of hepatitis, another died in a plane accident, and this was years ago before terrorism or any of those dangers arose. I suddenly realized, "good grief, here I am, anything could happen to my husband at any time, how am I going to support myself and my children? I can't go back to this diplomatic career which I've left, it would be very difficult to reenter." I felt I should prepare myself in a different area.

So for ten long years in and out of Washington, I finished my degree in library science. For the last six years of our time in Washington I worked as a professional librarian in the Fairfax County library system. So therefore in a sense I consider myself a professional woman, and I consider what I do in the Foreign Service as an unpaid member of that service, also as a profession. I think most serious senior wives do when they decide to participate. And it is professional -- management, personnel issues, leadership issues, being able to participate in the life of the country, representing your country on a very high level -- I think it should be considered as a profession.

I have come to believe, after thinking about it over many years, that senior [wives] should be compensated -- not for some reasons people have advanced but because, simply, in our society respect comes with pay. In recent years I have found that I have won very little respect even from the officers in our own mission because I'm not paid and I'm not considered part of the team by our own Department. Therefore, people assume I do not know or do anything.

At various points, particularly in El Salvador, which I'd like to talk about, which was a very difficult, intense, high-level public profile post for us and where we were in constant danger all the time including, as all the newspapers said, specific death threats to my husband and our having to be taken out on 24 hours' notice -- I was very much part of that team in that particular country.

Our house was very secure -- it actually looked like a maximum-security prison -- as I considered it, the good guys were in the jail, everybody else was outside! There was

barbed wire everywhere and there were Marines at the house, which we've never had before or since, and on the roof all night. We had these young men with us all the time, we traveled with maximum security. And because our house was considered safe, everybody stayed with us. We had, I would say, in the two years time we were there, probably fifteen major senators with us -- [Lloyd] Bentsen (D, Texas), [Gary] Hart (D, Colorado), William Cohen (Maine), David Boren (D, Oklahoma) and others. They stayed the night with us, they held meetings there, I had breakfast with them if my husband wasn't there. We had every major military chief-of-staff, because it was then that kind of situation in El Salvador.

I participated fully and it was a full-time job, and I do remember at one point where we also had a lot of junior women officers. Most of the people in the mission were single people, since it was very difficult for dependents with children to be there in that era. Anyway, Representative [Stephen] Solarz (D, New York), whom I think everybody knows, came very often. We've known him for many years; he came to Jordan. His wife was not expected to come, in fact few wives accompanied the representatives. My role most of the time was in the household keeping everything on track for suddenly you'd be called and forty people were arriving on thirty minutes notice. I had to make sure our household was running.

In this case, at the very last minute, on a Friday, say, we were informed that Mrs. (Nina) Solarz, who's a very active person and a professional in her own right, would arrive separately from Congressman Solarz and would like to see and do certain things on her own, including visiting some refugee camps. I was very involved with something in El Salvador, I don't recall exactly what, and couldn't accompany her, so I was told to call a junior woman officer -- it could as well have been a man -- and tell her the situation and ask her to accompany Mrs. Solarz. Which I did. The answer I got from the young FSO was, "Oh, Mrs. Pickering, I'm very sorry, I can't do it, my weekends are free, why not let one of the wives do it?"

I was outraged. I didn't answer her, I was stunned, I should have said, "Well, the wives like to have their weekends too." I doubt if she realized how important Congressman Solarz is and that Mrs. Solarz might be a very nice contact for a young officer to make, to accompany her to a refugee camp. These were some of the experiences I was beginning to have in El Salvador. Perhaps this is just when it happened to surface for me personally. I found that there was total ignorance in the younger officers' corps of my role or the role of any senior wife in the mission; total lack of understanding of the representational function, they had never been told, it's not part of the A-100 course, it's not mandatory for any wives to go to courses any more.

It got so difficult in El Salvador that somewhere along the line my husband and I sat down and wrote a little protocol guideline for the officers in our mission, i.e., "please come on time when you are invited to a reception or a dinner." We made it very clear: "Your spouse does not have to accept as a non-employee. However, if you accept, please understand this is a working dinner; you are expected to assist in talking to the other

guests and assist with the party. Please answer the invitations." I'm appalled at how many young officers do not answer our invitations. Even if it's often 'regrets only' but they don't even reply to that.

The young officers coming in are trained in every other aspect, but they're not told that this representational function is part of the mission's policy in a country, part of our efforts. We're given money to do that and we're very accountable for that money. The ambassador and his wife, the DCM and his wife, the political counselor and his wife cannot be the sole people responsible for this important function. This is the opportunity to meet people from the country in which they're serving. So many of them, particularly the spouses, look on it only as a social occasion. I have no objections if they do not choose to participate, I'm fairly modern about accepting that. But if they choose to come, I do feel that since I and my husband work very hard at these social events in terms of meeting people and talking to them, everyone should be part of it. I don't think that entering officers who are married, be they male or female, receive any counseling about life overseas. I've ended up recently -- in Tel Aviv, by the way -- with young wives whom I've asked, "What happened in Washington before you came out?" and they say, "Well, nothing, we weren't able to go to the A-100 course because my husband was moving, I was left behind in New Jersey to pack, I don't know anything, I don't know what I'm supposed to do."

I find that more and more true. Maybe the opportunities are there and are simply not being used -- I think there are great information and communication gaps, because I know there are areas in the Department that are trying to offer this. But I find so many young wives in particular arrive at post with absolutely no knowledge of what the Foreign Service is about. This is sort of something their husbands decided to do, they simply do not know where to start or to fit in. It becomes a major problem for the senior people. Plus the fact, of course, that there are more and more tandem couples.

From the viewpoint of a non-employee wife the advent of tandem couples has brought enormous changes in the way a mission operates. In Tel Aviv we had several, in fairly high-level positions.

My experience with that, as much as I approve and think it's wonderful and it certainly is never going to go back to anything else, is that they're not carrying their representational load. And I must say that in many ways all these great reforms which are steps forward have made it more and more difficult for the few senior wives who are willing to continue -- because our responsibilities have become greater in that sense. I can appreciate if, say, the woman officer is working ten hours a day, how can she entertain? But what if she is the economic counselor and he is the political counselor, who then is going to take up their responsibility on the representational side?

In Tel Aviv, for example, we did have a large house and we did have a staff, not the best I've ever had, and we found that week after week we were being asked by different sections of our mission to do a party for them, I mean it was their party, they had a visitor

and they would like to invite their contacts, but let's do it at the ambassador's house, let's ask the ambassador to do it for us. It would be their portion of the representational effort in funds but let's do it at his house.

Again I go back to a younger generation which perhaps has a different view of this whole function. They simply thought, "Well, let's do it at the ambassador's house; it's very easy to do it there. Why not?" Because the better a house is run, the better these representational events are done. And the easier they look it means somebody has done a lot more work behind the scenes, and that's usually me or somebody in my position. If I'm not there in a situation where there is an unmarried ambassador, the Department would hire somebody to do this. Which I very much resent, because the function is recognized, it's not a question of not recognizing the function. Otherwise, why would they pay in a situation where there is not a wife to do this?

The Department in my opinion has given up the "two for" philosophy. We no longer consider that the Department gets "two for one," as we all know, but they still want it both ways, they still want a wife who's there to do it but they will less and less recognize her, less and less compensate her even in terms of respect and position within the mission. And I don't see that so far the function has changed. *(End of tape, side A)*

In any case, in compensation terms I believe there has to be some way of doing this, or we have to face the fact that representation, therefore, isn't considered really part of U.S. foreign policy. At the moment, the Department gives us the money and recognizes the function but they're making it more and more difficult to do. I assume that in the next ten or fifteen years there won't be people like myself who decided we would stay with this and do the best job we could for the sake of our husband, first of all and secondly our country, as well as pride when you're in another country of representing well our country and our mission. I suspect that is going to change drastically and I think the Department then has to decide: are they just going to put representation into hotels and restaurants, which will be a totally different thing; are they just going to hire people to do it; or do they want it done in the way it's been done in the past, with a very personal style, and help the senior wife do it well?

If it's not salary, if it's not a supplement to the husband's salary, at least -- and I know many women have expressed this -- it should be access to Social Security. In our present American society people are absolutely lost if they don't have that access. Because of being overseas so much, I don't have enough time that I've earned on my own for Social Security, and will not, so I've given up my access to partake of the benefits of our society. And I think that is VERY unfair of our Department not to recognize that as a very real issue for the wives.

I was very insulted by the Department representative who came to Tel Aviv to explain the program that was proposed at that time of the new Associates program which was to provide more access for women to work in the embassies, more access to having jobs in the community -- a very good program. Many of us felt rather upset that they were

sending a man who was only "assigned" to this, he had not been involved; we thought some of the people who had worked on the program should be making these tours outside the country to explain to the missions' spouses and families what the program was all about.

We called a meeting in Tel Aviv. We must have had the best turnout of all the wives we ever had -- more than for any tea or anything I ever gave, because everybody was very interested in this. He explained, grudgingly -- he was not, I think, himself in favor, we got that distinct impression. The DCM's wife raised the question: "Well, you haven't considered in any of this the role of the senior wives and how they might be compensated for this role." He really put her down, in fact she was in tears, which is very bad for a woman to do, I know! And I raised my hand and tried to go over that situation and said to him, "Why is it not possible, when the Department gives contracts to roofers, contracts to swimming pool attendants, contracts to the children to be lifeguards -- if I spend two hours in the town of Tel Aviv helping to buy dishes or curtains for the mission, why can't I turn in a time sheet? Or if I spend three hours preparing for or shopping in the market for such-and-such a party and it could easily be identified what and when it was done, I would be happy to accept minimum pay per hour, just the minimum wage, more than I get now. Because I reckon I spend sometimes 30, 40 or more hours per week on mission affairs. Why wouldn't that be possible? At least give us an income, at least give us Social Security credit? Because I truly believe for most senior wives it's not the amount that counts. We're not at all asking to be paid on the level of even an FSO-8, we're just asking for some compensation, which will then give people an idea within even our own community, let alone the Department, of the time and what goes into this job."

He looked me straight in the eye -- I will not tell you this man's name -- and said, "Oh but Mrs. Pickering, how could we verify that? Nobody would be willing to supervise that because of your husband's position." (she pauses) I felt that challenged my integrity, that I would lie about the hours! I was so dumbfounded, absolutely completely dumbfounded by an answer that I felt was so insulting, so rude, I couldn't answer. Afterwards of course I felt I could have made a perfect answer and say, "How do you trust the drivers in our mission when you send them on an errand and they give you a time sheet? How do you trust anybody in our mission who does things outside the purview of a supervisor to give you honest answers?"

But I believe that was the type of reaction that senior wives always get when they propose some of these solutions. I don't think it's always the bottom line of money, although money is a bottom line and funds have to be found. I think it's a drop in the bucket compared to what is spent on many contracts and people who come out on TDY. I'm sure a salary could be paid out of very few visits. I think it is definitely an attitude and I think that is going to have to change. I don't see any signs, unfortunately, that it's changing, because we now have an inspector general in the Department who is outside, as is true of all other government departments, an independent inspector general with some component of foreign service officers. My recent experience with the people in that office has been exactly the same type of experience where it's presumed that we are cheating or

that we are somehow trying to make money from the government. There's a presumption of waste, fraud and mismanagement up front, and the feeling is that they are going to find ways to make sure that we do not order too much food so that we can eat on it for a month -- very simplistic ways of looking at it. It comes I think really ultimately from Congress, which is a populist organization in concerns of representation going way back to the "booze allowance" and all these things we've all heard about over the years; a refusal to look at the job that has to be done.

I come to New York, because we're in a unique situation here as we're our country's only diplomatic mission in our own country, it's unique. A lot of the problem is legislative. Some of the foreign service legislation was written I don't believe with intent to exclude New York but simply was written for foreign posts overseas. So there was nothing ever put in to cover us in New York. I must say, in the last administration when the United Nations was not popular in the U.S. or in Congress, there was never an effort to put that in.

I find that outrageous, however, because what it does is to affect people in our own service, people assigned to New York to serve in this mission. We are here with the largest diplomatic corps in the whole world -- 20,000 people, much larger than Washington. Until this week there were 159 countries; now there are 175. There's no country in the world that hosts that many other countries' missions. Plus the fact that our main effort here is to work with all other countries, there are no bilateral situations in a multilateral organization.

Many of those other missions' ambassadors are uninstructed so those ambassadors here have great leeway in how they vote or do not vote since they don't have time always to get back to their governments. So their representative really has more power than my husband when it comes to voting. Our job is to know these people. We've had an extraordinary experience this year with the war in the Gulf, where I believe very strongly that the personal relationships that we helped establish and cultivate over the last few years helped us gain votes that we needed as a government for our U.S. foreign policy.

My husband and I worked very hard from the minute we came here. On top of the issues that are being discussed in the UN at the General Assembly, in the Security Council, in the Economic and Social Council, the range of topics is absolutely mind-boggling. I thought the Middle East was complicated and issues were important, and they are, but we're dealing with every issue in the entire world. My husband and others today are working very hard on Cambodia; we've seen the emergence of Namibia as a new country. We've seen enormous changes in the world, the most enormous changes, I think, since we entered the service in the 1950s.

My husband was not appointed to the service when he first passed the FS exam because everybody was frozen as a result of the McCarthy hearings and we waited three years to come in. We went out to Africa at the height of the Cold War, and this is the first opportunity since then to see the world change. We have been part of that at the UN so

we feel very fortunate to have been here at this time.

I find it very disenchanting to feel that our own Department despite these world changes so clearly reflected at the UN continues to feel people who are here in New York somehow have to sink or swim, without realizing that to me and every single American unless you happen to have been born in New York City, this is as much a foreign city as any place I've ever been. To come and live in New York involves for most of us just as great a cultural adaptation as an overseas assignment.

Our people -- wives, families, spouses -- need help on this, but our inspector general does not look at it this way. They're looking at it in their purview of the budget, not in terms of the job that has to be done. Aside from New York I think it's also happening everywhere, because of the way this particular independent inspector looks at our missions. They don't look at the job that has to be done, they look at how much we spend and how we spend it, without any comprehension of where we are going or why we're doing it.

As I mentioned earlier -- I did mention it and really want to get back to it, because I also find it within the U.S. component of our embassies -- there is a populist kind of streak in Americans which we recognize, I know, but now it's sort of becoming that we're "elitist" because we entertain. We have to entertain, it's the way we must do it, it's the way diplomatic life is done and it hasn't changed yet. When it changes I'll be happy to change, because (laughing) I really enjoy picnics a lot more. But I feel if we're going to do this for the U.S. Government it should be done well.

In New York we are the host country, for example, and I feel we should do this as well as any other mission in New York. When we invite New Yorkers who're involved, I want it to be the best. I'm proud of that. And to have people say, now an explicit sort of thing, "Well, you're being elitist by doing this," is very discouraging. There is a negative feeling, a very pervasive resentment of the fact that somehow we live here in the Waldorf -- sorry about that, if it weren't called the Waldorf maybe the stereotype would be different. Even sometimes Americans in our own mission don't understand that we're not living here as a personal choice, that we have to live in a place that's big enough to have representatives of the 175 countries, that we have to have a staff.

People misunderstand, they think it's "wonderful that you have maids and servants and cooks." Of course it would be impossible for me to do this without them but they also don't understand the psychic toll it takes on many Americans, including myself, never to have any privacy: I don't have any privacy in my home because we have staff there, and in any large residence it's the same.

I have the responsibility of dealing on a day-to-day basis with all the problems and issues of that staff. I learned labor negotiations in Tel Aviv, I really did, I had to. When contracts were proposed for their pay, I've had to defend my staff sometimes against mindless cuts by our administration, because I consider the residence staff as important as embassy staff to the running of our mission. They're the ones that make it possible for us to fulfill this

representational aspect and I feel that if they are not treated well by our government, given reasonable working conditions, reasonable salary increases, they won't stay. And if we don't keep good people, then the ambassador or the principal officer is not going to be able to carry out his function. It's incumbent on me because I'm there every day and they come to me with problems and issues that I have to solve. It's not easy. It's not a bed of roses to have servants all the time and yet it's misunderstood. I find that there is this rising sort of misunderstanding of what we're trying to do even among our own junior officers and mission staff, and that is quite upsetting to me.

Plus the fact that there's another whole issue that has changed since we entered in the 1950s. Every foreign service person knows this, and that's the issue of danger and terrorism threats. I know that our Department is very conscious of this, I know we've increased the number of security officers. I think they're trying very hard and I'm not criticizing that. What I think has not been recognized is the toll in stress and worry on families and spouses. This is very different from thirty years ago.

Thirty years ago we went to Zanzibar after the revolution there. In fact we went because our predecessor, Frank Carlucci, who went on to be Secretary of Defense, was persona non grataed from Zanzibar, so we didn't go to Lubumbashi in the Congo. My husband was the only one in Swahili language training, so we went to Zanzibar. Which was wonderful, I was thrilled to go there, but at that particular time we were isolated. There were East Germans, whom the U.S. did not recognize, The Peoples Republic of China, whom we didn't recognize, and North Vietnam, North Korea, all the Eastern European states. There were four Western consulates there -- the French, the British Deputy High Commission, ourselves and the Israelis.

We were completely isolated. We sent our son in first grade a half day to a onetime Catholic school made over into a public school and then I taught him at home. Our little daughter never went to school at all until third grade, she was tutored. Children wouldn't come to play with them because we were "the imperialists," after this great revolution in Zanzibar. I recall dropping my seven year-old son at a corner in the old town of Zanzibar, then I would go around the corner and wait because his one friend in the school was the son of a Goan from India, a doctor who was still on the island. The doctor couldn't have it be seen that we were taking his son to our house although he was happy to have the child come. We would drop him, they would take him, then we'd pick him up. Looking back now, I don't know how we had the nerve to leave the child down there in the midst of the town.

So there were all these problems there. I learned this lesson also, which was very hard for a young American just out of college and just going out in the Foreign Service to understand -- that people could not speak to you, shun you not because of you yourself but because of your country. I think that's a very hard thing, and people don't always learn it readily. I learned right in the beginning, that OK, that's it, it's nothing to do with me; it's because of our relation to the U.S. that these people aren't going to have anything to do with me.

Anyway, going back to terrorism, which I started to mention. I was never afraid there. I mean, I never thought even with all these revolutionaries that anybody was out to get us. They disliked us; they would have nothing to do with us. It wasn't at the level that if they didn't like you they would kill the American Consul, and so on. That was "early days" in that sense. What is changed now is that we Americans have become targets and it's not always the senior officer, it can be anybody. But it is a stressful thing for senior officers. And again I think in regard to the role of the wife and families. The Department doesn't recognize how difficult this is -- to carry on, to do the job that we're doing voluntarily, to represent your country and have this other stress and concern for your husband all the time. I just want to bring it up because that's another great big change since we came in, as a personal thing.

I believe the Foreign Service always has reflected and always will reflect our own society. I know that, and therefore all these changes that have taken place within the service -- the specific ones such as equal employment opportunities for minorities and women, tandem couples, the '72 Directive -- all these are good and reflect our society and we wouldn't want it any other way. I'm not objecting to any of it. I'm only sorry that I as [an] individual didn't benefit from all of that. BUT on the other hand, what has been lost -- and this is the other major change for me personally during the last thirty years -- is the sense of community that existed before that time. I think there was simply a different way of looking at our missions at that time: a wife went out with her husband expecting to be part of the mission, expecting to be considered part of it, that has the bad and the good with it. And we did lose the good aspects, because people are no longer close as a community. Therefore, I think we are having lots more problems with all the things we know about, that also reflect our society, because we have lost our support groups. The Department has been up front about alcoholism, I'm happy about that, but it's still up to the supervisor to identify that and that's very difficult.

The mental health program has been wonderful. In El Salvador I was behind our mission's getting that established. It was extremely important at the time we were there and we happened to have a very fine dependent wife who took that on. And I think that program when it works well is wonderful for a mission. It doesn't work well sometimes if you don't have the right person there to do it, and that's a big problem.

I know in my last post, Tel Aviv, it was extremely difficult to the group of spouses and their children and their families together again. My point is, it doesn't have to be "together" in the sense that we've all got to do the same things and go the same place and have a private club. I don't mean that at all. I simply feel it's a need to feel that they all are participating in some way in what the embassy's doing in the country.

What happens now is that there are individuals -- and I recognize some of them you can't help no matter what you do -- who become what I would call "bad apples." They complain, they expect embassies to do everything for them, they make unrealistic demands. But at the same time this influences a lot of other people, including first-time

people serving and it affects other agencies because our embassies now include lots of them besides the Foreign Service. Instant communications make life very difficult. You have Secretaries of State dropping in on you every other day, which you didn't in the past! You have enormous frustrations sometimes dealing with the country you're in because someone on CNN is saying something in the United States that twenty years ago the country would never hear. (laughter) I'm serious!

There is so much more stress and tension, plus our role in the world, plus terrorism, that it's sad that within our own mission we are also having more tensions among our own people. And it's partly because of our own society and the way it's developing, partly what the Department has decided to do. And I really seriously feel the Department is not even trying to help before people go to posts. They seem to think they'll "do it all when people get to post," somehow. And somehow I don't think that's enough.

I think there has to be a lot more counseling, more training; even making it mandatory, if possible, though that's not possible for all young wives, but a lot of them simply don't get the message that it's important. They say, "Gee, I wish I'd really known it's so important to know about all these things." People need a lot more support from the Department, in the Department, so that when they're preparing all these young officers and getting them all trained to go out, it's important to include their families, too.

Then, of course, there is the senior officer's wife's "problem" because they'll always say you've got recognition because you're the wife of the husband. Of course, there is the Avis Bohlen Award [for outstanding volunteerism]; that's one person a year. I know there are efforts to recognize volunteer work and what people have put into volunteer work. I think the Department makes these statements; I assume they mean it. I assume that probably this will help all the way along the line. But it's only, now, for volunteerism, right?

A lot of these younger wives are still very consumed not with volunteerism but "let's get a job." My point is, we have also helped on that, with work agreements and all these things that we've all pushed. But there still needs to be counseling because there are countries they'll go to where there's no work agreement. There are going to be professions like my own, which is librarianship, in which I was preparing myself for employment in the U.S. if I had to; I wasn't thinking about working overseas. But if I had, I wouldn't have chosen librarianship because you have to have languages. I can't go to Tel Aviv and get a job because I'd have to have Hebrew, I'd have to know intimately the language of every country. So that's a lousy profession for working overseas.

People still need to know that there are going to be situations where they'll probably not be able to work. And that's where I think pre-counseling comes in, I think, for young couples entering the service. What are you going to do when there are such situations? Then volunteerism might enter but a lot of young people don't think of that on the first level and I don't think it will get the kind of recognition that a lot of us really would like to have. It's going to be recognition for volunteering, not recognition for a job we're doing for the U.S. Government, which the government on one hand says is tremendously

important, yet when you do it they'll say it's "volunteerism."

On many points here, for example, I'm a non-employee. I tell you my problem in New York. I am the wife of the chief of mission and so forth, but I cannot set foot in a government car unless my husband is in the car. When Mrs. Perez de Cuellar [wife of the UN Secretary General] asks me for lunch for Mrs. Bush, and the streets are blocked and I can't get a taxi -- which I'd have to pay for, other people in our mission if they make official visits are reimbursed, I cannot be -- I have to get myself there somehow. I can't drive in the city because there's no place to park. I cannot get into a U.S. Government car alone. They can send wine from the mission to my house, it can arrive in the car, flowers can come in the car, messages can be sent over, but I walk. That's fine, good exercise for me. But on principle I do not understand this, and I have never in my whole career ever used an official car for anything but diplomatic calls, official events, I've always had my own car and driven to the hairdresser and all that. I've always recognized that line. But in New York, I can't use my own car because I can't park. I'm not willing in principle to pay \$50, \$60, \$80 a month for taxi fares on business for the U.S. Government. I'm invited for lunch up in the East 80s. I've refused lunches last year from three ambassadors for their foreign minister -- one was out in Scarsdale; some ambassadors live in the suburbs. I couldn't get there without spending a considerable amount of money. Frankly I'm very resentful of that. I'm invited to these things as wife of the U.S. representative. Certainly in all 175 other missions at the UN the wife has access to a car for official events.

That's the kind of thing I mean about being a "non-employee." I'm not employed by the U.S. Government, I have no access to cars, no access to anything. On the other hand the government says, I can't accept a gift or I can't give political speeches. They have it both ways. I would like to challenge that sometime and say, "Why can't I receive a gift?"

There was no senior wife here in the mission for ten years when I came. I went to all the various things in New York that involved the UN, made contacts, and people were ecstatic. "We haven't seen anybody from the U.S. mission for years." It wasn't just me as a wife. The contact had been lost with the New York City Commission for the UN, for all the volunteer groups from the city that worked with UN delegation wives. Everything I did was "wonderful" simply because I appeared.

Right now I can't say how many invitations we get a week; it's just hundreds. My husband also feels -- and this is why the job up here is incredible, not just diplomatically in the UN -- that part of his job is to speak about what's happening now at the UN because of major changes from the beginning, I mean with the beginning and end of the Cold War -- all the things happening up here that were making it possible to get long-range things done -- environmental things, all the things the UN works on that nobody hears about.

He feels that it's such an important part of his job to convey to the American people what is happening at the UN. So he's got a double job that most of the other countries' representatives don't have, but we feel if the U.S. public doesn't understand what's happening, there won't be support for the UN and we think it's important for our foreign

policy. It all follows around.

It's a very personal commitment, though, and often a sacrifice, because a lot of these affairs are on weekends. When I'm invited and they will pay my expenses, I'm allowed to accept that if it's specifically for a speech or the like, because I enjoy that and I love hearing questions Americans ask, just as I would if I were in some other country. So we have that whole element of the job, and we have all those invitations to balance off against the specific UN-related organizations which right now are very busy because all the heads of state are coming.

I find it infinitely fascinating and rewarding, just as I've felt at all our posts. I've always found something extraordinary in each country, and I find that if people don't come into our service with that feeling, that they're looking for or hoping to find these opportunities, they don't have an enjoyable time, and I feel sorry about that. Wherever we've been I've tried to open up opportunities for people, particularly for spouses and family and I concentrate on that. I really don't try to interfere, and overseas I don't attempt to speak in any way for the government. But I've ended up being leader of many groups and I guess in that sense I've become a "people specialist."

The UN is kind of a culmination of all that yet I do enjoy it, and it irks the life out of me that I have to walk the streets of New York to get to these things I'm doing for the U.S. Government. And it irks me that the Department doesn't care. I mean, I have the distinctive feeling that from top to bottom really nobody cares whether I do this or not and that there is no comprehension or consideration of what "wife of" can contribute to the mission. And so I'm doing it for myself, my husband, and probably for my country, but I get very negative vibes from our Department right now. I do. That's why I think this is very important for me personally to be able to express these things.

Q: This is Jewell Fenzi interviewing Alice Pickering on May 19, 1992, at my home in Washington, DC. This is our second interview.

In order to accept a plane ticket, to go along with your husband when he was speaking, and it wasn't a USG ticket, the organization provided it, you are now expected to put that on your tax return as "income."

PICKERING: Yes; as a gift.

Q: And yet you are a "private individual" with no obligations.

PICKERING: I assume they could say that the only reason I was invited was because I am the wife of the representative who had been asked to speak. But as far as I know my husband is not mandated to show it as personal income as a gift when he's been invited to speak officially by, e.g., the World Affairs Council or a group of that nature, which is not

a private organization but a public spirit organization involved with international affairs. I don't know the precise regulation but these are all issues that have to be approved individually by the legal officer in the Secretary of State's office; that's where this ruling about this travel issue came down.

Q: I would contest it on the grounds that if I have to claim it, my husband. I mean, what's the difference?

PICKERING: That's a little dangerous, because then they may decide (she laughs) they might have to do the same thing; I'm not sure.

Q: I think he's doing them a service by going and speaking to them. Maybe that's a distinction.

PICKERING: Yes, of course. He's contributing his time and experience as a government employee to speak on an issue of public concern, which I understand, and he does that very frequently. However, I feel that there are increasing restrictions on spouses, wives or husbands of dependents by the Department of State that seem to imply that we also are considered in an official capacity. At the same time, in every other situation that is an asset to the government we're distinctly considered as not employees.

I find the whole issue of giving us diplomatic passports something that could be considered putting dependents in an official capacity for travel and for their own protection as dependents in an overseas situation. I think there are many issues that could be explored legally concerning dependents and their status.

Q: Absolutely.

PICKERING: It would be a very good project, I think, for one of the groups that are involved in dependents' issues to explore further, because I think many of these things are simply decided on a basis of an individual person reading a regulation in a way perhaps that the Secretary wishes it to be [read] or that management wishes, that are not perhaps necessarily interpreted that way in every case.

Q: Before we started recording you asked what AAFSW is up to these days. Well, AAFSW has finally endorsed spouse compensation, and Cristie Shurtleff, who is one of the officers has put forth a proposal to hire spouses on a contract basis to do the traditional work of diplomacy. She presented that to the FLO office recently and was turned down absolutely flat.

PICKERING: By whom? On what basis?

Q: By Maryann Minutillo? I'm not sure, I don't know all the details because I haven't talked to her about it, Shurtleff was not at our last meeting. So our group, the Foreign Service Spouse Oral History, is considering forming an ad hoc group to reform the '72

Directive. The basis for our changing the Directive would be Kristie's proposal. Donna Hartman, who's here in Washington, has agreed to work with us, and we were going to take it right to Larry Eagleburger in the fall. Some of these things that you've just told us that the Department is working the spouse issue both ways when it benefits them. We're untouchables, we're private individuals, but when it also advances them to have us be in an official capacity, then we suddenly assume those colors. It seems to me you've had an awful lot of that.

PICKERING: And I do believe something you said, Jewell, about FLO and I've been concerned about it for a long time. I'm not saying CLO, because they're overseas, they're working in their community and doing only what they're mandated to do by the FLO office. But the FLO organization has increasingly turned, and I've talked to many of the members, some of them are my friends, to the situation of working wives or finding opportunities for women to continue their careers or work in embassies or expand the work agreements.

All of which is very fine, but they seem to have absolutely taken no responsibility or concern for the dependent wives who are fulfilling or who wish to fulfill the representational function and all the other things we've been talking about. I wrote a paper a long time ago, which I'm sorry I've packed it up now, not thinking it would be needed just now, I'll find it, giving what I outlined as the important areas in which the senior wife participated.

When the first effort began under Sue Low and that group to obtain compensation for spouses, and they asked for our input, I gave three areas; and under each area I gave some details on things that I had always participated in. One of course I considered was management. And management concerned not just the representational function in terms of ordering food, preparing the parties, planning the parties. I included things such as staff organization, which would include personnel issues, because any senior wife who has a staff must deal with issues like salary, of wage compensation, of leave; of contracts for those employees, which I consider a very real management issue.

I considered inventory control, which the ambassador or other senior officials are responsible for but I think it normally tends to be whoever is managing the household to be responsible for furniture, silver, anything in the household; participating in ordering those materials. I consider that a very real participation for the government in almost a General Services or inventory sense. And on and on in the management field. I think most senior wives develop good managerial skills.

Secondly, I included the cultural relationships that usually can be developed in a country through women's organizations, through the senior wife's participation in areas that normally the mission's officers are not particularly involved; simply time issues. And I added a lot of things under that heading that senior wives can professionally contribute to the role of the mission in any country.

Q: Please send us the paper.

PICKERING: I really wrote a long paper, because I was trying to bring out every professional avenue that a senior wife can develop and therefore participate in the mission's function.

Q: This [paper] could be very valuable to Kristie's proposal.

PICKERING: I know. That's exactly what could be used for that. (I may not have my materials available before fall.) Let me rethink. There were three areas: Management, Cultural Affairs, and of course Contacts. That wasn't how I titled it, in the context of the role one has in meeting senior officials in any country, meeting the wives and families of senior officials, participating in any sense with visitors that was the third big area, now I remember. Not only receiving official American government officials but also receiving other officials, particularly Americans who come in any capacity university figures, people in the arts, in business, and I think it is definitely in the role of U.S. missions to be the facilitators between visiting groups and the people of the country. As to the wife, along with other officials in the country, to develop skills as far as what is available in the country, what are the resources, that you can become a facilitator for visiting Americans. To establish bilateral relationships beyond the official government-to-government relationships I always thought was a very positive role for spouses, and particularly for senior spouses, to play, because they're often just in the situation by nature of where they are. This can be a very productive role that a spouse can play within the mission if she approaches it professionally and learns about the country in which she's living and then is able to interpret it for the visitors in our own areas.

Those were the three areas that I identified. Many people could add many more things.

Q: I think those are probably primarily cursory areas, too.

PICKERING: And I'm sure that could be developed into a very ...

Q: The administrative part.

PICKERING: Oh, the management part is becoming increasingly important in terms of financial accountability as well for all the representational functions.

Q: I thought that the one area where there was a legal possibility is one of discrimination, because now, say you went to a post where your predecessor has been a bachelor. You can keep on that \$22,000 a year housekeeper but you cannot let her go and take her salary yourself for doing the job. That is discrimination, and if there is no housekeeper there and you don't want to do the job but you do it for your spouse, you cannot be paid to do it. That is out-and-out discrimination against sex, the dependent spouse. I think (she laughs) there's a lawsuit there, a class action.

PICKERING: And I would also suggest to the group that they explore what I've done in several places for various reasons: What is being done in other foreign offices? For example, I know the Canadians in the early 1980s had a Royal commission appointed to deal with the specific subject of the spouses of the Foreign Office in Canada. And they came up with a very good program very similar to the one we're discussing, in which if the wife agreed and wished to participate, there would be a contract of some kind in which she would have identifiable functions for which she could be paid and she would be responsible to the Foreign Office for fulfilling those functions.

It sounded very good and was very well received by the Foreign Office wives. However, it was never implemented by their parliament because of course it would cost money. But I think it would be worthwhile for the group that is proposing these changes in our own situation to certainly explore the Canadian proposal, because there might be some very good material in it that would support what we wanted to do. And also [explore] the Scandinavians or any of the countries that have developed a more advanced role for the spouses in terms of compensation. That might be supportive of our proposals, so the Administration wouldn't perceive that we were alone in this, that certainly it's a problem worldwide increasingly for wives; and their proposals might contain a lot of good material that could be useful to support our position.

I know that in particular the Canadians' sounded very close to what our proposal seems to be and might be the best one to look into. I know it was derailed only because of money, not because it wasn't approved by either their Foreign Office -- I think they approved it -- and the wives' group approved it. It just simply came down to the problem of the finances to pay for it.

Q: Since we're talking about cutting down the Defense budget to help decrease the deficit, isn't it possible to effect something like spouse compensation with funds already in the Department without having to go to Congress and have them legislate it? Can't funds be shifted? Can't we cut back somewhere?

PICKERING: I believe so. However, I think the Department of State, as usual because of opening all these new posts, is severely cutting budgets worldwide. And of course that would be the problem. I think it's always the problem. There are possibilities, I don't think there's any reason why funds couldn't be changed; they give contracts for many things in overseas situations in order to get things done. But I think money is always tight, and it's very difficult to give it to spouses.

Q: Recently, \$250,000 was given to FLO to enhance spouse employment initiatives. And they're talking of spending it on videos and written material. We don't need that: we needed that 20 years ago, in 1972 when suddenly there was this schism and spouses were free and spouses were being caught up in the women's movement and were looking for employment. People know how to go about looking for a job nowadays, they don't have to be told how to fill out a Form 171 and how to do informational interviews.

PICKERING: Well, I thought most of that was already available through the CLO and do you understand why the FLO seems to be so negative toward spouse compensation?

Q: Yes. Because you have people now who've been in FLO for any number of years, they've become part of the bureaucracy. They have to work with Management, so their interest is in protecting their turf, protecting their position with the men and officers that they have to work with in the Department. Lesley Dorman in 1978, when FLO was born, advocated that it be physically outside the Department, because she insisted that that was what would happen. At first we were supposed to have spouses like Janet Woolley, who came in primarily as a spouse although she had had some counseling education, and it was supposed to be a rotating thing. Well, it doesn't get rotated very often. They get a tremendous salary, \$80,000 or something like that. Heavens! you could cut those salaries in half and people would still be crying for them. And you could rotate the job of Director of OBC it's such a high-ranking Civil Service job.

PICKERING: Which, again, started out as a very dedicated spouse who developed it and started it and

Q: Yes. No spouse who has been in the field could ever hope to.

PICKERING: Because they won't take somebody for just two years.

Q: Right. But she could never get to this elevated GS rating and be a trailing spouse and go from post to post.

PICKERING: I would like to mention something else, if you're putting all this down to explore, because I don't know if this is accurate or not. When we went to Tel Aviv in '85 and on, so it's very recent, when the CLO position became open the second year or so that I was there, our DCM's wife wanted to apply for that job. She was told she could not, that it's a general rule because, of course, her husband as a DCM would have to supervise and report. If that is still true, I think that is definitely discrimination. I can understand why the ambassador's wife, [sic] in terms of just mission feeling, would not want the ambassador's wife to do it even though she might be better qualified than anybody. But I think it is very unfair to out-rule the DCM's wife. I think the CLO could be supervised by the Administrative counselor. And I don't see any real conflict of interest for a CLO as a DCM's wife and I think that's a case, again, of really discrimination against a senior wife.

I was told that it was pretty much across the board that I think these are the psychological problems that senior wives face, and I mention it in my tape. It's not just that our own Department and, say, now that FLO is not being positive or trying to assist the senior wife in her role in any way. But we also have a psychological problem within the mission which is very real and hard to overcome, but that I think should be addressed where people feel that jobs are given and it's nepotism. The higher and more senior the wife, not only is the government holding that you're not an employee but you have people, and junior people, feeling that if you do get anything that they perceive as a perk or a job,

even if you're the best qualified person and I'd say that would certainly have to be the case there's a great deal of resentment toward a senior wife. So I think we're facing all kinds of problems on all levels, and I think it's no wonder that the senior wife is feeling besieged, threatened, and very discouraged and disillusioned right now.

Q: There's an aspect of the Associates' proposal that disturbs me greatly and apparently some of this, I think, \$350,000 can be used for a spouse who writes her own proposal to do work in her field at post. Alice, I can think of nothing that would be more demoralizing than to have the DCM's wife, if she were to get a stipend like that, to go out and do something in her career field where you had 15 women under her who were doing the ordinary jobs in the embassy which have gotten better now than telephone operators and visa file clerks, in some posts. What is that going to do to morale if you have these women working in underemployment jobs in the mission which is all they can get, and the DCM's wife has a nice stipend from the FLO office because she's written a nice FSA proposal to go out and work in her field as a volunteer in the local community but be paid through this FSA stipend? It just absolutely blows my mind that no one could see what a demoralizing effect that would have. The only person who would benefit from that would be the person who got the stipend and the proposal.

PICKERING: I've always felt that was the part of the Associates' program that was not addressing some real problems. I feel that anybody who has some expertise in her own field could probably go ahead and pursue that in some way in a country; and if it was not addressing the issues that we're talking about.

I go back to another thing that I talked about in my history tape: I feel, because of this lack of concern from top to bottom in the Department here in Washington, what we're also not doing is giving young officers and their wives or spouses whenever they come into the Service a clear understanding in their orientation and briefing.

Q: (laughing) Of why they're here.

PICKERING: Of what this whole role of representation means within the context of the mission, representation's function in the mission. I find that most junior people [think] that it is simply fun and games. No one's ever sort of brought it to their attention, put it in any kind of context. Even half an hour of the A-100 course, which wouldn't be much, to explain how this fits in and should fit into the mission. Otherwise, why do we get so much money to do it on the senior levels? And because it's on a senior level, I think the junior officers think, well, it has nothing to do with them. And you start right at the beginning with a misunderstanding and an ignorance of what this is all about, from the time they enter the Service and then go off to their first post that I think 30 years ago was not true.

We certainly were given much more of an understanding, there was certainly a wives' course that at least gave some glimpse of what you might be expected to do, but in a positive sense as being part of the mission, not as something far out having nothing to do

with the political or the economic officer. And we've seen what happens is then that young officer comes to something at the ambassador's house where you're inviting important people, key people, for a very specific reason, and the junior officer thinks it has nothing to do with politics or economics or commercial affairs. They're much less prepared and ignorant about this function than ever before, and that leads to a lot of this misunderstanding within the mission of the role of the senior wife or of the ambassador himself.

Q: It puts a greater burden on you.

PICKERING: And I think the Department is failing to put that into the counseling, the orientation, from the beginning. Don't wait until you're a senior wife and the responsibility falls on you and you realize you're not having any support or help.

Q: I read somewhere recently that very good, dedicated, career senior wives after the 1972 Directive were afraid to share their knowledge with some young upcoming officers and that a lot was lost. Do you think that's really the case?

PICKERING: Well, I certainly know that when I went out in '74, which was just shortly after the '72 Directive and it began to take effect, I was told very clearly in the briefing I had because in those days they didn't have an ambassador's course or anything but I did go over for a morning to the Overseas Briefing Center and they brought in various people who explained some things. I remember that memorandum was shown to me and I was told "you must not, you cannot ask any dependents." I as a non-employee of course shouldn't have anyway. But this was in terms of any of the functions he would be doing at our house or I would be involved in. That we could not in any way ask anybody to do anything unless they volunteered.

So, I went out with that in my mind and I certainly was very wary about that. And I also found that at that particular time, even to ask people to do volunteer work not at my house but, say, the American Women's Club, you would try to get people interested because the morale issue is also involved there.

Q: I think that would be my forte.

PICKERING: Yes, responsibility for morale. But I found that at that point, people were so sensitive that even if you asked a junior wife or anybody junior to you whether your husband was DCM or consul general or whatever, a lot of young women interpreted that as a threat, that you even asked them to "volunteer," although I was told you could ask people to do things on a voluntary basis. But a lot of young women at that time would even resent the question and felt that that was pressuring them. Which I didn't think was true if they said no, I would never have considered that in any way a threat for me in any form.

So there was, I think, a very difficult transition period. I think now if a senior wife would

ask somebody to volunteer to do something, the person would consider it yes or no, they could or could not, and wouldn't consider it a threat or that to say no would be difficult. I think that's gone back but I certainly even up to now am very careful what people might interpret as a request from you to do anything.

Q: When you invite a couple from the embassy to a function, do you invite the wife with the understanding that she is to work? If she wants to come, she participates? If she doesn't want to participate, don't come? Do you do that?

PICKERING: Well, I think I mentioned that in El Salvador in the early 80s we found things to be so difficult that in terms of the protocol issues my husband issued (laughing) we wrote a protocol memorandum for our embassy. We had an enormous number of high-level guests, we had very high-pressure things going on there, and this memorandum made it very clear that when people from our mission were invited to our house for representational events, these were some of the considerations.

This was addressed to the officers of the mission. We made a very clear statement in the first statement that this did not apply to non-employee dependents of the officers but if they wished to participate in any of these events, we expected the following rules to apply, i.e., if you're invited for an event please come 15 minutes beforehand so that you will be able to find out who's coming and so on; you are expected to stay until the end of the time frame of the event; you would be expected to speak with the visitors both American and non-American rather than (she laughs) to spend your time with other personnel of the mission. All things that we thought were absolutely basically ingrained in every Foreign Service officer.

But we were finding at that time it was never part of any training. Most of the young FSO's said, "Gee, nobody ever told us this." They weren't told that they should come a little early, that they were expected to stay through the whole time frame of the party, that they were expected to be there to assist either in introducing people or accompanying people to the door, various things that would need to be done at an official function. Many of them said that they were very grateful but they simply didn't know that these were the normal protocol roles/rules for an official event. And most of them were quite responsive.

However, there was one wife, her husband was our public affairs officer, who just never came, just wouldn't come. Which was fine with us, there was no reason she should, but it was far better than a group of dependents coming and not spending their time being useful. For instance, answering invitations: people simply didn't. This may be part of our society now; we were brought up 30 years ago in a different frame and we were taught these things at home. Maybe this isn't happening now. Even in New York, officers who were sent invitations "RSVP or regrets only" often simply wouldn't reply, and our protocol officer in the embassy it's bad enough having to do it with your foreign guests, but then to also have to go through half of your mission to find out if they and/or wife or without wife were coming because certainly in New York we were paying caterers by the

person. It was very important to us if half of the dependent wives weren't planning to come, because at some point we would have to say how many people we were expecting and we would have to plan for that. I always insisted, if the invitation was in my name as well as my husband's, so it was not a stag affair, that we invite the dependent wife. I never felt that if it were in my name we should only ask the embassy officers. I always felt this offered an opportunity for the dependent wives to be there; I felt if they wanted to be involved those are the times they should be involved. So we always did invite them, and often many of them could not come because of children and babysitting, which was fine, but we simply had to know a count, and I think even overseas this is important when you're planning a major event. And a lot of people simply never answered the invitation. These things seem so basic to me, and yet that's what we had to do in El Salvador. The first item was "please respond to any invitation by the ambassador, the DCM, or any other official in the U.S. mission." I was quite appalled that these young people seemed to have never been told that in the framework of their jobs in the Department. This is when I went back to some kind of half an hour in their A100 course that it might be helpful when they get on post to have some idea of what is happening now.

Q: I would have thought in a place like El Salvador that they would welcome companionship and welcome a feeling of belonging. Because that must be a very...

PICKERING: I think in El Salvador when we were there, with the intense political activities that were going on, the first democratic election in many years and so forth the officers truly were working long and late hours and I think they felt going to a party, even though it might be for a senior Senator of a major Committee or the Army Chief of Staff, someone like that, was just to them a burden. I understood that. What they didn't realize was that my husband, all the other senior officers were working just as hard (she laughs) as they were. It wasn't that we were demanding any more of them than of us, and we always felt this was a wonderful opportunity for the junior officer, as we felt when we were junior officers, "Gosh, you might get to meet that Senator. You might get to talk to him, and he might ask your opinion, and you might meet up with him later and he might remember you."

Now, maybe we were more street smart, or politically smart, in making sure, when we got the opportunity to meet American as well as the foreign guests at these situations, to take advantage of it. I'm not sure that a lot of them understood that at all. There seems to be maybe again it's a generational thing of course, maybe the types of people entering our Service are different; I can't comment on that. I just observed a difference, a great difference when we started going overseas in the 80s than even in the 70s after the changes of the '72 Directive in the way that more officers and I don't mean junior, I don't mean even the very entering first tour, I mean all the way up to Counselor level seemed to be behaving quite differently toward the events in which I was involved, i.e., representational events, major visits, events, in their wanting to participate in anything in the cultural sphere that we were trying to do if we had a cultural event at the mission. Of course, USIS is obviously involved but we always thought other people in our mission should have that opportunity to meet a different group of people in the country where they

were living.

Sometimes major artists, writers, people in the cultural level are also very influential in political affairs as well, e.g., in Latin America some of the major political affairs there are the authors, writers, musicians. I'm not sure that [our officers] understood that either, as part of the job.

Q: How much freedom did the spouses have in the local community in El Salvador when you were there? That this many children were going in buses?

PICKERING: When we went to El Salvador in 1983, dependents were just being allowed back. They had been evacuated and had been a non-dependent post for at least one and a half years, so I was very lucky it wasn't because we were going back, it had been changed and so...

Q: Did you follow Bob after [the evacuation]?

PICKERING: No, we followed Dean Hinton, who was by the way a widower when he went and in the last few months married a Salvadoran young woman. Dean had been there two years before us. So the situation was becoming much more normal, dependents were back, and it was the first time I was ever in an embassy, this is an interesting situation to describe, it was the first time I'd ever been in a mission or an embassy where the dependents had been evacuated and this was the return.

I found that in the two years previous to us, with no dependents at the post, it was quite a different post. The officers were there then worked together, worked very hard 12 to 15 hours a day. Then they would all go out together to eat. They lived together in houses for safety. There would be three or four people in a house; and so forth.

When the dependents started coming back, people began going into individual households. Men in particular whose wives and families had come, because most of the women who were there were single, would go home to their wives and families after whatever work hour and there was quite a morale problem for the single officers, both men and women, because suddenly their whole support group was gone. The consequence was there was great resentment against the dependents. It wasn't our fault, and rationally everybody would realize that.

We found the Administration section, the GSO's, resentful because there was a lot more work when suddenly everybody was going into houses. Suddenly the wives were asking to have some kind of curtains put up in the windows. (laughing) I mean, that sort of thing. The wives ran up against something of a stone wall in the Administrative Section because they weren't, simply, prepared for this. I found a real role in my gong to the Administrative officer, working with them. I always have seen my role as speaking up for the dependent community, and in that case I really had to be in there a lot and to try to be helpful, and explain, and get over this transition going to a normal post situation.

So the wives often were very discouraged. And I thought they were very courageous, because there was still a lot of activity going on. Not directed specifically against embassy personnel at that time but there was an enormous amount of security and it's very stressful to live with the type of security we had, because it meant at any moment something could happen when your husband was out on his job. I think we had a very courageous group of women. We had an American Women's Club, not an embassy group but a women's club which included American wives of Salvadorans, which was very good, because these women married to Salvadorans had been there through all the troubles, were very supportive, knew a lot about El Salvador, which was helpful to these wives.

And we developed a real esprit de corps, which you often do in these maximum hardship places. You must. You either do or you've got major problems where dependents leave and so forth. We were able to do that transition, but it was very difficult and I didn't realize what it means when a post has been without dependents: it's a very different kind of atmosphere.

You asked how the wives adjusted. Sometimes I feel, in a situation like that, the wives were so happy to get back with their husbands and bring their families together and the school was running. The American schoolteachers were very courageous, too, to go back and be in that school. But sometimes it's easier when you have that kind of hardship and esprit than in some places that seem a little more comfortable. I've seen an embassy in another place have worse morale, much worse morale; much more difficult to pick it up. It's an interesting phenomenon that any of us who've been in the Foreign Service a long time know that hardship posts can be very supportive, you make friends that are friends forever. And (laughing) that's one of the great joys of foreign service career, because you do have that kind of support group not only when you're on post but when you're in Washington and when you retire. It's one of the great pluses.

Q: Tell me about being out in the desert.

PICKERING: Let me talk about our travels, because it's been one thing that my husband and I have found to be our own- (end of tape)

That's the part of the Foreign Service I relate to. I think travel is one of the things many people join the Foreign Service as their (laughing) purpose. Certainly for my husband and myself. But we also found, from early days on, that it was also something we needed for our own personal morale. I mentioned earlier how lonely it can be for a senior spouse, and I think it's also very lonely for any senior official; and to keep their mental health, I think anybody needs to find either an avocation or an interest outside the specific work they're doing.

In our case, and in many people's case, overseas is TRAVEL, and learning other cultures. So we've always done a great deal of travel. My husband particularly enjoys traveling by

land, he feels he doesn't really know the country unless he's on wheels where he can stop and go where he wishes rather than being confined to public or air transportation.

I think our particular travel started in the Middle East, because when we were in Jordan we were able to travel outside Jordan into desert areas using four wheel drive, which was the greatest thrill for my husband, and I also enjoyed traveling and camping in that way. We started the first year in Jordan with a major trip to "the Gulf," as everybody now knows the Persian Gulf, and the purpose of that trip was to go to Oman. We had lived in Zanzibar, and the Sultan of Zanzibar had been from Oman, in fact Zanzibar was always very closely linked with Oman.

In Zanzibar there were many part Arab people. The culture was part Arab, and everybody talked about Muscat and Oman. So our purpose was to get to Oman, which meant driving through Saudi Arabia. We went to Qatar, we went across a little part of the Empty Quarter [Rub el Khali] of the great Arabian desert, went through the Emirate, and finally reached Oman. We drove to Muscat and when we got there and were driving through the city to stay with our ambassador, who lived in a traditional, old house, we were so thrilled because we kept saying, "It looks just like Zanzibar!" Only, it was really au contraire.

We saw, of course, dhows, the Arabian vessels that used to go on the monsoon back and forth from the Arabian Gulf country to East Africa or on into India and back. We returned from Oman of course driving back through some of the same route but on the way back we went to Kuwait, flew to Bahrain because there was no bridge then, back to Kuwait, and drove from Kuwait along the famous pipeline road back to Jordan.

I mention the famous pipeline road because that's the road that we've all seen, in photographs recently during the Persian Gulf war, that was used extensively by the UN's military forces and of course by many people fleeing to Jordan. In New York, everyone at the UN was amazed because my husband knew every area, he knew the routes, he knew the roads. So you never know when these travels are also (she laughs) going to become politically important.

Q: That was quite a trip. How long did it take?

PICKERING: Two and a half weeks. We did a lot of camping, and we organized ourselves with two vehicles with a group of people from our mission, including our son, who came out from college. We learned a great deal about desert driving, resources that we could use. I saved the day on a later trip, because the next year we took an extensive trip at the same time of year, between November and December, about two and a half weeks, to Yemen.

We drove from Jordan through Saudi Arabia into a very difficult sand area between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, in which we had to hire a guide from the local sheikh, and the guide went with his Russian weapon, a Kalashnikov, and he was like a bandit of the 19th century, who led us through this sand area into Yemen, which is a different world from

the rest of the Gulf. We drove to Sanaa, on to the coast of Mocha, where coffee was originally grown, hence the origin of the word. As we were returning along the coast of the Red Sea gulf, we had enormous problems with our vehicle, a Chevrolet four wheel drive carryall that most of our embassy people used as their major vehicle, which I used on official trips for my husband within the area of his concern, so we were able to use embassy vehicles.

We always took two vehicles. There was usually the military attaché or someone else from the mission with us. We were beginning to have major problems with this particular vehicle. As we were on the coast, seemingly hundreds of miles from anywhere, we hit a rock in the road and punctured the fuel line. We envisioned being stuck for days and were trying to repair the thing. My husband always made sure somebody with us was a very good mechanic and we always carried spare parts and did a lot of the work ourselves. We just needed something to fix this hole. We had no special part with us but I always carry a lot of chewing gum, because I find in the desert you get very dry and thirsty and sometimes drinking soft drinks doesn't help but chewing gum does. I had packed some, and we decided that would be one of the best things to patch this vehicle. So six of us sat in the car chewing gum until we had an enormous wad of gum, which actually we used to pack the hole in the gas tank. We managed to make it up a great escarpment. There are very high mountains in Yemen, something like 7,000 feet altitude, that one must cross to get back onto the plateau of Saudi Arabia to return to Jordan. So we were going from sea level up over this 7,000 feet, and we finally arrived in a town in Saudi Arabia where we knew we could get the fuel line welded. As we were driving down the main street, dirty, covered with dust, looking like, well, certainly not from an embassy, a huge Cadillac pulled up beside us, in the back seat of which sat an emir, in white robes, absolutely immaculate; with his driver. He pulled up, because of course we had a foreign license plate and were looking for a repair shop, to ask what could he do for us.

When my husband stepped out and identified himself as the ambassador from Jordan, looking (she laughs) like a hippy from who knows where, the Emir looked rather intently at us, but we had our passports and he immediately said that his chauffeur-secretary would direct us to the place where our car could be repaired. And then he sped off. Indeed, they were very helpful to us and we did reach Jordan safely.

That was our second major trip in the Middle East, but we did learn how to drive, how to prepare for that kind of traveling. So in 1981 when we went to Nigeria, my husband said from the moment we arrived we must cross the Sahara. I was quite game for that. We started to prepare almost from the day of our arrival, which was very fortunate because in less than two years we left Nigeria to be posted immediately to El Salvador much to our amazement, we didn't even have quite two years in Nigeria. But we started to plan this major trip across the Sahara.

And there were quite a number of people in Nigeria then who were interested in the same kind of a trip. We started with the British World Bank representative and his wife, who were our mainstays, the four of us were the nucleus of our group. We began the planning.

A year and a half later, in January 1983, we took our trip to the Sahara. Again we had, two vehicles and we had prepared for desert travel. One of the ways my husband prepared everybody who might be expected to drive was to take them out onto the sand of the Gulf of Benin, our sea in Lagos, and make them drive up and down in all this sand, and if we got stuck, how to get out by using sand ladders. We prepared in many ways. We got navigational equipment, and a little water purification machine from Switzerland. Every time someone went to England or back to the U.S. we bought compasses and information, because it was a very serious matter, we felt, and it was, to cross the Sahara. We started from Lagos and took 26 days driving from there to Algiers and back.

Q: And back!

PICKERING: Well, that's a usual question! Because when we reached Algiers, everybody said, "How are you getting back?" And we said, "We're driving back." Because we had the vehicles, one of which was the embassy's, one the Lagos Military Attaché's, we had to return the vehicles. And we took two different routes anyway, so we saw more of the desert in any case. Of course, 900 miles of the total, I believe it was 1,700 miles altogether, was in Nigeria itself. To go from Lagos to northern Nigeria is a long trip in one day, certainly.

We were well prepared and we had no trouble, but at various points when we saw other people who were stranded, we realized that perhaps crossing by camel was safer than crossing by automobile. Because if anything happens to your vehicle, you are in serious trouble. We had spare parts. We had everything imaginable and had to have repairs done on the way. But I think that's what happens to people now. In the Sahara, if your vehicle breaks down, you're in trouble, but camels usually don't break down.

It was a very thrilling trip. We took along with us, besides our British colleagues and some people from our mission, the wife of the chief justice of Nigeria, who happened to be British-born, her husband was, of course, Nigerian, as were her children. She was a woman in her mid-60s, who heard about this trip and asked if she might come along. We were very surprised, although we knew her quite well, that she wanted to come. And then we got a bit nervous about taking the wife of the chief justice of Nigeria along in case an accident or something like that did happen, (laughing) it might cause a diplomatic incident. But she was determined to go and we were delighted to have her. So we had a very international group of people.

We divided all the work so that each person had a specific task. My husband was the leader of the expedition and he drove all the way up and back. Our British colleague was the navigator, who kept meticulous records of our trip and kept us on course the whole way. I was the commissariat, I guess you would call it I had bought all the food and organized the meals, because we camped a great deal of the time in the desert, and packed it so that each night we knew which dinner was in which box, which breakfast, which lunch, so that we didn't have to totally unpack the car.

My husband's secretary went along, by the way, and she kept file cards of where everything was packed in the vehicles so we didn't waste time packing and unpacking unnecessarily. I did not do all the cooking, however; we shared that, and for every night we had a duty roster of who cooked, who washed up, who worked on the cars, and so on. We were really super-prepared. I kept a journal and when I came back also wrote up the trip journal, which is great fun for us to look at. We all took slides and when we returned shared in having copies made.

Our British colleague's wife and I then went on a lecture tour when we got back to Lagos, because everyone in Lagos was agog over this trip. They weren't sure they'd ever see us again when we left and they were very surprised to see us when we came back 26 days later, in great shape! So, every group from the Chamber of Commerce to the international women's clubs to our own embassy, wanted to hear the tale of this trip. We did a very good job, we thought. We organized our slides, we displayed the artifacts we had collected along the way, things from Niger, some from Algeria, including some stone microliths we found at a dry lakebed. Our Near East archeological experience had taught us to recognize things like that, stones and so forth, in the desert. So we did a whole "road show," as we called it, when we returned. And that was lots of fun.

In El Salvador we weren't able to do that kind of traveling or camping, of course, although we did visit all of the countries in Central America. Specifically, we went to Nicaragua. My husband felt that to return from El Salvador after having been to Nicaragua at that time would be valuable, which we did.

In Israel, we were able to pursue our archeological interests again by visiting major archeological sites. And we took three major trips to Egypt every year because that was the only country accessible by land from Israel; unlike Jordan, where we were able also to visit Turkey and other places. I have an interesting story to relate about our last trip to Egypt. The first time we went there from Israel, we visited Alexandria and some Coptic sites. Coptic monasteries still exist in Egypt. The second year we went to the Sinai, which had returned to Egypt in 1978, and spent four days camping there; not only the St. Catherine Monastery but also for ten days we explored some ancient Egyptian turquoise mines that are very well-known archeologically.

But for our final trip, during our third year, we decided we would like to visit the oases in the western desert of Egypt, because we loved desert traveling. We had to get out our camping equipment and get it back into action again. We started off by driving to Alexandria, then along the coast, visiting El Alamein and some World War II battle sites, and to the famous oasis of Siwa, where Alexander the Great had stopped on his way to the Middle East and consulted the oracle about his future; it is said that he was made a god at Siwa at that time and his fame was predicted. So we went to the oracle at Siwa. We didn't get a message from the oracle, but we should have known, because something very important happened at the end of the trip.

From Siwa we went back to the Fayum, a very particular part of the Nile Valley near

Cairo, and drove to the western oases. One night while we camped in the western desert, a few days into it after having visited two oases and several early pyramids, suddenly the Egyptian police who I shouldn't say they'd been escorting us, because we didn't want their escort, my husband had good maps and we knew where we wanted to go, but they had insisted on wanting to accompany us. They kept rather distant, and they didn't understand why we wanted to camp out, though we found it very glorious. They would leave us at night, and we kept telling them please not to come early in the morning, we'd get up fairly early but we wanted to do so alone.

Suddenly, at 7 a.m., while we were still in our sleeping bags, a policeman came, and my husband said, "Oh, no, no, go away " but he said, "No, no, Sir, you are wanted from the embassy in Cairo. You must call them." This was just after Thanksgiving, 1988." So we got ourselves up and asked where was the nearest telephone. That is a very important question in Egypt, because telephoning takes a long time. We went to the next large town. The only place to make a call was at the PTT, the post office, so the policeman led my husband there. The phone was not working. They then went to the train station, found a phone, my husband finally got through to the embassy in Cairo, and was told there was a call for him from the Vice President's office, Vice President Bush having just been elected President.

Unfortunately, because by now it was in the middle of the night in Washington, they decided to make a date for 5 p.m. from the place where we planned to spend the night, farther up on the Nile, not as far south as Luxor. We drove off, with the embassy waiting to make the call for us. We spent the entire day being unable to tell our friends traveling with us what it was about, and indeed we did not know. So we spent the entire day wondering what was supposed to be our fate we knew we were due to leave Israel very soon but had no idea where we might be going.

We reached the hotel where we would stay, a former Russian-built hotel, put up for an aluminum factory in the area, a gigantic white elephant of a hotel. We were the only people staying there but that's where we had booked in and where we were to make the telephone call. We checked in, and at 5 o'clock my husband picked up the phone in our room only to find it didn't work. Then he discovered it wasn't connected into the wall! (hearty laughter) So he raced down to the front desk. The only phone in the hotel was at the front desk, surrounded by all those reception people, the security people, everybody waiting to hear this phone call.

They got through to Cairo, they got through to Washington, the Vice President gets on the line and says, "Hello, Tom," and Tom says, "Hello, Sir " and the line went dead. Totally dead, which is not unusual for Egypt. So the process starts again and takes about ten minutes to get through. The conversation starts again. "Hello, Tom" "Hello, Sir" and the Vice President says, "Tom, I have an important job I would like you to do" and the phone went dead again! I was so happy I was sitting upstairs in the room or I think I would have dropped dead.

Finally, on the third try the phone call gets through and as it begins, the VP's secretary says to my husband, "Oh, by the way, is this a secure line?" (she breaks up, laughing) And my husband said, "Of course not. I'm in a hotel. Oh, yes, it's secure except for everyone who's listening on the line between here and Cairo and Cairo and Washington." So at this point the Vice President said, "Better make this very fast: I would like you to go to New York as our representative to the United Nations." And my husband said "yes" before the phone would go dead again. When we got back to Cairo, my husband said, we would call again, of course.

So he came upstairs to tell me what the call had been about, which had taken at least half an hour and I was really beside myself; and he told me about the job at the UN, which I was very thrilled about. But about two hours later by now it was late at night, we'd gone to bed, and I couldn't sleep. I finally said to him, "Oh! but that means we have to live in New York!" which I was not happy about. (laughter)

So that was the last of our adventures traveling in the desert. I think we should have known when we went to the oracle at Siwa that something was going to happen.

Q: That's a lovely story, it really is.

PICKERING: I'd like to say one more thing about travel that came to me that I'd thought about earlier. It's a question that people always ask us, as they ask anybody in the Foreign Service: "What is your favorite post?" At first I had great difficulty answering that question because in most cases I've enjoyed every post we've ever been, for special reasons. I've finally come upon an answer that I'm comfortable with.

I always say there are two ways to answer it: one of the first is, "it depends on one's age, whether or not you have a family, where you are in your career."

Q: Absolutely.

PICKERING: And I always preface that by saying that our first post, besides Geneva, was on this wonderful island of Zanzibar, with two rather small children not so small that I had to worry much about their health, as one would with babies, but not old enough that we had to worry too much about school; and we lived a wonderful life with them at that age, because we could be in the water all the time, we had a boat, we had a totally outdoor life which was wonderful for them and wonderful for us at that age, with that age children.

If somebody asked me to go to Zanzibar today, although the U.S. no longer even has a post there, it would be very different, it would be very confining. It would have no intellectual challenge in every way and it would be very devastating. Later on, beginning in 1981 when for various reasons we'd only be in a post a very short time and suddenly be called off to another place, if we had had children with us of school age or they were in college, that's quite different; where we would have had to make transitions from school

to school. Again, I think it would have been equally devastating if we had not been free. So, I really believe that part of perhaps you could say "luck in the Foreign Service," part just your own choices that you make in the best possible way, lead you to sometimes be in places that are difficult for you because of these considerations.

But we have been fortunate. We have been in places where it suited the age of our children, our own age, our own interests of being able to travel the way we like to travel. For instance, in New York the last few years, we've been very confined because we haven't been able to do that. That's been a hardship for us personally for our own morale and mental health. But I think all those things must be kept in mind when you say what was your favorite post.

I want to add to that the other thing that I've found is central that, again, I learned by accident but was able to build on. And that is that you must personally find something that is very satisfying to you to do. For me, it's been finding something different that I would never have thought about doing if I'd stayed in the States and pursued a onetime career, one thing.

For example, in Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam, I developed a love of going for seashelling, something that everybody does there, but I love to swim, I love to be out in the water, and this gave me a challenge to find seashells, to learn to catalogue them, to learn a lot about that whole aspect of South Pacific life that I truly enjoyed.

In the Middle East, as I've mentioned, we did archeology and that was a great love for my husband and me because we had been history majors, we could discover the roots of our own civilization. I was able to take two courses, one at the American Center of Oriental Research on just the history of the ancient world, another on pottery identification, because we did a lot of traveling and going to sites where pottery was available and I felt a great curiosity to learn what that was about. So I had that sort of intellectual stimulus, as well as combining it with being able to explore and see parts of the country.

So every place that we have been I've tried to find some way that I, outside of the mission but related to the country in which I was staying, could find an interest that actually at dinner parties you could talk to people about. And I've found a very great personal satisfaction in that everywhere. There isn't a country in the world where a person can't find something.

Q: Well, and your whole circle of friends are flattered when you show an intense interest like that, too. It helps.

PICKERING: It's true here, too. Often we've found that we saw far more of the country and knew far more of the country than the people who live there. That of course happens in Washington, too. That was really rather fun, and in many places we found people from the host country who also enjoyed doing things too. In Israel we often went with Israeli friends who wanted to show us particular archeological sites that they were fond of.

They're all intensely interested in biblical archeology, and so we would spend a day together, with a picnic, and that's a wonderful way to meet people from the country in which you live. Again, aside from politics or anything else you might be involved with. That is, I think, the secret of your own good morale in a country.

The other part of that question which raises another issue that I've learned in my own experience is that, for me, what makes my life in a country outside the U.S. the most interesting is getting to know the people of the country. You can have the plushiest embassy in the world, the best housing in the world, you can have every facility in a modern sense, but if you are not able to get to know the people of the country for whatever reason, if you don't develop relationships with the people of the country, your experience there will not be a positive one.

I mention only one case: our first overseas post was Geneva, and when people ask, "What was your favorite post?" and you don't mention Geneva, because to most Americans that seems apt to be, by nature, the "best" post, wonderful scenery, every facility you could want, Western in every way you could wish for and I have to tell you it was not my favorite post in any way. Because the Genevois were not easy to get to know. They were not particularly friendly especially to people. The UN mission, and in our whole two years there we only knew one family. They were from Zurich, and they told us that they were just as much *étrangers* (foreigners) in Geneva as we were. We got to know them through our children at school, and we became friends.

But when I look at Geneva as a Foreign Service experience, it in no way compares to my life in Zanzibar or the Middle East or Lagos, which were very hardship posts in many, many ways. And I remember in Zanzibar, where we were very isolated much more so from the community than even in Geneva because it was during Cold War days and things were divided and we were not popular as being the American consulate or American embassy. But I remember [I was] invited at some time to a small women's group which was considered totally nonpolitical, and I went to that group it was sort of a mother's union kind of thing in the English sense. And these women, even though we were in tropical Africa wanted to learn to knit, because they still put wool caps and coats on their children in the cooler season (That's about 70 degrees instead of 90.), but never mind, they still did that, and they wore wool caps.

They wanted to learn how to knit. I'm not a very good handicraft person but I did know how to knit. So I volunteered to show them. Two or three times a week I would go down and do basic knitting lessons, on basic needles, with whatever yarns we could find in the markets. I got friends to send me patterns of booties and such. We managed to produce some sometimes strange looking articles (she laughs) but they were proud of it.

I don't think anything has touched me more in my whole life. I really get teary when I remember it. As we were leaving Zanzibar, again, in a very (she gropes for words) I should say environment that was almost hostile to us as Americans, not to us as people but as Americans And we went out to the airport with our things and those ladies from

that group, five of them, came out to say goodbye to me and waved goodbye. I really get overcome when I think about it. I think that was probably more important than larger groups I've dealt with ever since.

Q: That leads to my next question. When we think of "foreign relations" and "foreign affairs," if the general public thinks of them at all, I think they think of it as what our husbands are doing. How would you define our contribution to foreign affairs? Because we do make a contribution. It's very hard to define, maybe, because I've always felt that it was hard to measure what USIS does in a country because you're people to people, it's not a written formal document, it's not a formal relationship between (laughing) can you say in 25 words or less, Alice?

PICKERING: I can do it because you've hit a chord with me. Because I started out as an information services officer, that's where I had my one-year experience of my own as a Foreign Service officer. Consequently I deeply believe in the role of cultural affairs within the Foreign Service context. And I find that the role of the spouse in the Foreign Service, outside of USIS, often functions in the same way because it is the people-to-people context.

And I remember in the 1950s when we were starting out, President Eisenhower had this program called "People to People." It sounds very simplistic but over the years I've seen what this people-to-people context can do in your relationships in a significant way. I have met people in every country where I've been who, for example, have visited the U.S. on USIS's Special Visitor program. Now, my contribution to that now in a different context is that often USIS will come to the ambassador and his wife and say, "Who are the people you're meeting in this society where you're living that we should send from sectors of life in that country?" And I find I can often come up with women I've known in organizations with which our American Women's Club has worked, whom I can identify as people who would benefit the most from this experience of coming to the U.S. and seeing other groups in our country that can be beneficial to that country to take back, and that these are the type of people who will become leaders in their country in the future.

Not only women but in any of the sectors in which I've always become involved again, fairly much cultural. And I mean cultural in a broad spectrum university as well as the arts, because I've often spent time at the universities either studying or going to lecture groups or trying to pursue some of those kinds of interests outside of just the "pure arts." And I feel that is the way that an embassy functions best: when you are [in] contact with all segments of the society in the country in which you live and can make significant contributions to their knowledge about our own country, which is certainly one of the roles that we have to play, and being able to identify and sense. Take the educational standpoint, for example.

I feel that you do not understand how a country functions until you understand how their educational system works. What do they do in their country for the education of their own people? If you understand that you have a greater sense of how the current leaders of that

country have developed, where they're coming from. So if you see the broad range, and you understand the broad range in the country in which you're living, I simply feel that the embassies have better resources when they pursue policy interests in that country. How to approach it, how to deal with it, how to give our views to these people in an acceptable way.

I know my husband believes in this approach and we've always done it together, because he knows my background in USIS so we've always encouraged things to be done at our house that will be in the cultural context as well as the political context. And I also find that as a senior wife, I spend hours going to official functions -- teas, dinners, concerts in the country wherever you are. You're constantly meeting people -- not necessarily just the spouses of the leaders, you're meeting people all over. I always go with my husband to the universities when he makes calls, and I meet, as well as he does, people.

I find if you talk to them and you wish to learn and you're also feeding in your own experiences as an American or what the U.S. possibly can do in relations to the country's organizations, I can't help but believe that it fills some role in our overall relationship with that country. And this is what we're always trying to do one of the mandates: You build better relationships between your country and whatever country you're serving in.

That's the approach I've tried to follow all these years. And what you find, of course, is that you always get more out of it than you put in and I learned as much as I could. I think that challenge that is there is something that keeps me alive and happy. I think we agree on these things.

So I want to be positive, I don't want to be negative on what I said earlier. I think there are so many positive things about the Service, and the way you approach it and what you can put into it.

Q: I think that rounds out very nicely your first interview, don't you?

Q: It is June 29, 1999, and this is Jewell Fenzi at the Woman's National Democratic Club interviewing Alice Pickering. This is her third interview for the Foreign Service spouse oral history, which is now the AAFSW Oral History Collection.

There was something we hadn't talked about.

PICKERING: Yes, there was something after we did the original that you wanted me to say.

Q: Yes.

PICKERING: Okay. Well, that interview was when we were leaving for India, about a

week before we left, so it's just totally gone out of my mind. Totally. [laughter]

Q: I have one question about this. [Reading from AP's sheet] You have here India and Russia. Were you president of the American women's club in both of those places?

PICKERING: Yes. Honorary, and I participated to whatever extent I could and I felt it was important. I want to show you one more thing for your own info because this was done while we were in Russia. It has the history of [Spaso] house, most of it. It's Russian on one side and English on the other, and it has the list, you see, of all the different ambassadors, who was there when, and so forth. If you want one, I have a whole stack of them.

Q: Yes, I want to put it in your file.

PICKERING: It's quite good and a lot of the things I know about the house came originally from that. I want to make a note to say that I spent a lot of time in Moscow collecting articles and memoirs about the house that I could find.

Q: Now, where would you like to start? I see you have notes.

PICKERING: I do, because I just wanted to make sure that there were certain things I didn't want to forget to talk about. What I would like to say is, again, where we left off in New York and then tell a little bit about India, because there's a lot about Russia, and we were only in India a short time.

Q: Well, the only thing I did with the interview at the UN was take me out of it. I said so little. Instead of an interview, I edited it as a statement and I removed me from the transcript.

PICKERING: Well, I'm going to try this time not to talk too much about the role of spouses and all that because I talked so much about that before and I'd rather talk more about the experiences and the significance of some of the experiences. Then if you have a question. . .

Q: When we last talked it was 1992. That's now seven years ago. And then you were at the UN for how many years?

PICKERING: Well, we were just finishing up at the UN. We went in '89 and left in '92. We went in '92 to India and in '93 to Russia.

Q: Had you been here in Washington before going to the UN or. . .?

PICKERING: No, oh, no. We left Washington in 1981 and never came back. We were out for fifteen straight years. That includes New York, but we weren't back here. It was still a U.S. mission. Before that we were in Washington from '78 to '81 when Tom was

Assistant Secretary. But it was a long time that we were on a continually moving basis.

Q: Here I find, as ambassador's wife with huge responsibilities, not only were you the honorary president of the women's club, you were the actual hands-on president.

PICKERING: Well, I wasn't always as hands-on as you might think. I tried in many areas not to be too much hands on because naturally, it depended on the composition of the club. Sometimes it was composed in large part of Americans married to people in the country who had been there for years and years. Sometimes it had a large component of business people, which was not true everywhere. So every club was totally different. Sometimes I found there were conflicts within the club about how it should go that were long-standing. I felt it wasn't my job to directly influence the club in which way it should go regardless of what I thought, but what I always did in every club whenever I belonged was to make sure that I was on the committee that directed whatever charitable efforts the club was doing because there was always money involved. There was usually a little bit of a political problem about where the money should go or the distribution of the money. I always insisted that the club, of which I was a member--I was speaking as a member rather than directing it, really--should make sure that we visited every place that we contributed money to, that we did a very real assessment; that we did not give to individuals but to the organization itself; and always for a specific purpose such as buying an air conditioner if that made the life of the children at that organization easier. I had those certain principles in my mind, and I found that if I sat on that committee, not chaired it but always participated, went to the meetings, tried to go with the ladies to the organizations, that I had a better grasp of where this money was going. There were many times when I really strongly advised them that they do not give to a certain organization for very specific reasons. I felt that was a special contribution I could make. After a number of years I had a very good sense sometimes of what was happening, but I had to be very careful with personalities, as you can imagine.

Q: My question also is, I'm a little surprised that there were enough women who were still there to do this kind of work because at our last post before Guido retired, there was no American women's club because DCM did go out of his way to make sure that everybody who wanted to work was working. It was an English-speaking post. Well, everybody wanted to work! We had one hundred percent spouse employment in that embassy at times. The admin officer was very proud of that. But, of course, this meant that the ones who weren't working in the embassy were actually doing career jobs in the local economy. There was no women's club. This was a relatively small embassy, but there was no one out doing what you and I spent thirty, forty years doing.

PICKERING: I think you're absolutely right, and that is the trend. But there is a distinction between an American Embassy women's club and an American women's club. We were very often in countries where it was not an embassy women's club; it was an American women's club; and therefore, you could bring in the resident Americans, whether they were missionaries or business or Americans married to locals. I would say that most of the time with maybe two exceptions that's the kind of American women's

club that existed. I think that's the direction we're going in, and I always encouraged the members of the embassy community, who were not working or who wanted to volunteer, to join these broader clubs. I think that will survive because at the moment, I found in Russia, where we had an enormous business community that was coming in, the business wives were not encouraged by their companies to follow their careers. A lot of them had lots of time and they were very able women. They had been volunteers in their homes, wherever they had lived in the States. They were a great asset. And if the members of the embassy joined in with other women who were free to participate and volunteer in community events, it worked very well. I think the days of an embassy women's club probably are going to only last in certain places where employment isn't possible, which was true in India because we didn't have a full work agreement with India. Women could work in the American school as teachers and that was all. They couldn't work anywhere else. So there are some times where the limits of the host country will still encourage women to join an American Embassy club because it is a support group. That's what you lose by not having that kind of a club. You really have a loss of support, and I find as our embassies are expanding to include so many different agencies. Again, I cite Russia. We had thirty outside agencies and many of their employees had never had posts overseas. These people were coming with dependents and families who had never been overseas before and never expected to be overseas. They really needed a support group. So there still is a great need, I think, but we have to be realistic.

Q: Now let's continue, wherever, in Russia.

PICKERING: It's easier for me to do it chronologically because then I can remember a little easier. When I was last interviewed in May of '92 I had no idea when we left New York that we would still have two more fascinating countries in which to live and work. One of them was India and the other was Russia, both of them the largest embassies we had ever been part of, let alone helped to lead, and very complex societies. India, because of its large population; Russia, because of our past history of relationships with Russia. So I think that despite our thinking that the UN and New York was one of the most exhilarating experiences of our Foreign Service career, we didn't realize that it was going to continue and that the experiences would continue to be a challenge and to be difficult. I've been reflecting on this and thinking that things do come around in a circle, and as you stay in the Service longer, of course, your experiences. . .and you begin to see relationships to other places you've been, which certainly happened to us on the last tour, in Russia. But I also found that one of the thrills of the Foreign Service is that you're constantly challenged, constantly, every two or three years, even if you're coming back to live in the United States and readapting. I don't know whether that keeps your mind more alive or you stay younger for that reason.

Q: I've often wondered just that.

PICKERING: I find that even at the end of a long career, each experience and each challenge was just as daunting sometimes as at the beginning. I think young Foreign Service people don't realize what an exciting life they can have in this Service.

Q: Well, because a lot of them aren't really coming into it now as a lifetime career like we did. They're just in for a few years. Is that true? That's the impression I have.

PICKERING: I think for some of them, maybe that's true. I just attended a reception for the new A-100 course in June, and it's a class of 61, which is a very large class. Many women, of course. Many tandem couples. I enjoyed talking with them all. A lot of them were very excited about their first posts. They were going all over the world. I detected the same thrill of waiting to see where you were going to go as we had. That spirit is still there. I did notice that a lot of them were much older than perhaps our general A-100 course. They were in their forties. They'd already had a career, and this was going to be another career. I find that interesting and I'm not sure how that will work out, but I have a feeling that what happens along the way now is different. The situation now is that there is much more opportunity for people to use their international experience. We didn't have as many options forty years ago, maybe a bank or something. American business wasn't a presence overseas. There weren't the opportunities. For instance, in Russia we lost two or three young middle-level officers who, of course, knew Russian by that time. They were fluent in Russian and they were snatched away on the spot by American business at a time when our Service was scaling down. Foreign Service Officers were getting very worried. It was not their commitment to the career; it was the fact did our government have a commitment to the career of the Foreign Service. They saw people being let go, and they saw promotions getting very, very slim. They saw the downside of the shutdown of the government. So I think what happens is not at the beginning of a Foreign Service career, but at the middle level when there are other opportunities out there and all the experience they've had comes into play. I think they do stay in international areas. They're not coming back to settle down, I think, in most cases; they're going on and having a career living abroad, but doing other things. I think it's a condition of the changing of the world that we're living in now. And I think, unfortunately, the budget situation vis-à-vis the State Department, of course, feeds into that.

Q: That's always that way.

PICKERING: It's always been that way, but I guess it sometimes seems to get worse.
[laughter]

Well, in any case, India was a place that my husband and I always wanted to go to. We were absolutely thrilled to go, partly for the history, the great game, partly for the culture. Again, it was a place that we had never served before. We were very excited about going and very disappointed when we only stayed seven months. But we learned a lot in a very short period of time, and I think our love of travel, which everybody who's read my other interviews know is part of our joy of the Foreign Service, came to good stead because we've always said wherever we go, we're going to start traveling immediately. We going to get out and learn about the country. So if we hadn't done that in India, we wouldn't have gone very far.

We did travel widely within seven months, and one of the reasons we did was the fact that we had come to a post that had a very historic house called Roosevelt House that had been built in 1962, exactly thirty years before we arrived in 1992. It was built when John Kenneth Galbraith, one of our famous non-career ambassadors, but a very good one in India, was there in the years of President Kennedy. And, of course, Jackie Kennedy made a very famous trip to India during that year. The house, by the way, was designed by Edward Durrell Stone. It looks exactly like the Kennedy Center here. But after thirty years in the Indian climate it was really falling apart, and our predecessor had arranged that as soon as he left, the house would be . . . everything taken out of the house and major infrastructure repair was going to be done. So we had no choice when we arrived. We couldn't live in the house. We lived in a smaller bungalow, which I enjoyed very much because we were in a neighborhood with other Indian families. It was more like the Raj days and I liked that, and we fully expected to move back into Roosevelt House. And sure enough, it was finished the week that we were due to leave, and my husband wanted to go and sleep in the house one night, but I said no. We spent a lot of time on the renovation and made many changes, which our successor actually thanked us for. But it also meant that we couldn't do a lot of extensive entertaining in those months because we were in a very small house. So that made it easier to travel throughout India in the beginning.

We had one special experience, and this goes back to the circle of diplomatic life when in whatever position or wherever you are after forty years things often come around. One of the areas we wanted to visit in India was Kerala, which is in the southwest corner of India. It's called the Malabar Coast. We had always wanted to go there because one of our first posts was in Zanzibar in East Africa when Tom was Consul from 1965-1967. While we were there, we learned about Vasco da Gama, who had sailed around the coast of Africa and on to India in 1498. We had seen in Kenya the great cross that he had mounted in Malindi before he took his voyage directly across to India and landed on the Malabar Coast. We desperately wanted to see that area, and we took a special trip there to visit the town of Cochin and another place called Calicut with all sorts of historical references. Saint Thomas is supposed to have landed on that coast as the first Christian missionary and there are many Christians in the State of Kerala today. The first mosque was founded in that State, all because of the tradewinds that the dhows could use to bring people to that coast if they were sailing from Africa or the Middle East. And thirdly, of course, one of the last Jewish communities was in Cochin when we visited in 1992, with the oldest synagogue in India. Many people don't even realize there was a Jewish community in India, but I understand now that most of the Jews have emigrated so there's no longer an active synagogue.

In any case, we wanted to find the spot where Vasco da Gama landed; the official who was taking us said he could take us there, but he thought there was a high-level visitor also coming. He took us earlier, and we found the spot and we stood on the sand, the beach of the Indian Ocean. There was no cross, but some kind of a little marker indicating the landing site. Suddenly, a big official delegation arrived and started walking the beach as we did. We were very curious, so we walked over and introduced ourselves.

The official visitor was the Duke of Brabant, who is the pretender now to the Portuguese throne. He was there because they were going to be celebrating in 1998 the anniversary of Vasco da Gama's voyage. He was going on to Goa. So we had this great experience, almost a time warp, on this tiny beach in India.

Another experience we had in India in the very short time that I'd like to talk about was in December of '92. There is a very well-known mosque in the town of Ayodha, which is a Hindu sacred site. The nationalist Hindus tore the mosque down and burned it, which, of course, revived a lot of the religious animosities that are in India. At that moment, we were expecting a high-level senatorial visit. In India, we didn't get that many high-level visitors. We were actually at the end of the Cold War and India was, again, becoming more oriented to the West rather than to the Soviet Union as it had been in the past. It was the opening up that I think has continued in India. But we were very excited about the visit of Senator Boren, Senator Levin, and Senator Pell, who was our famous champion on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, with their wives. They are arriving in Madras and we had flown down to meet them when there was this explosion of the incident in Ayodha, which caused rioting and some very dangerous situations in some of the cities. What to do? What are we going to do with them?

We were already in Madras. They had not wanted to go see the Taj Mahal, which most people did, because they'd seen it before. Fortunately, we had arranged that we would go to Rajasthan. They had a plane, and we would land at the town of Jodhpur. The Maharajah of Jodhpur very kindly had agreed and allowed them to stay in his palace, which actually now is a hotel. We were very lucky because there were no riots in the town of Jodhpur, whereas in Jaipur, where the Maharajah had also invited them, there were enormous riots and it would have been very difficult. We had a magical evening in Jodhpur because the Maharajah had his own part of the palace and sent cars to take us up on the ramparts, which looked out over the entire town at night, and he had his own little orchestra playing. He's a very handsome man with his wife and they came out and greeted us. It was, for me, being back in the days of the Raj, because we had served so many places that were ex-British territory: East Africa, Jordan, which was Palestine. It seemed that we went places, and going to India, which was the jewel of the crown, to us was. . . I felt I was living out the scene of a memsahib from the Raj. Very romantic, but I felt that way. And this night was especially wonderful.

They had said in the evening that if anybody would like to do a camel ride in the desert early in the morning before we had to get on the plane and go to New Delhi for all the official events, they would be happy to arrange it with a young Indian who had studied in the States and had a camel safari organization. A lot of us said yes and got up very, very early. It was a scene that I'll never forget. They'd asked us to come very informally and we were going to go to a village for breakfast. When we all got down to the camels--and most people had on blue jeans or sports clothes, Senator Boren and so forth--Claiborne Pell arrived with his blazer, his tie, and khaki pants; and since he was the senior senator, of course, he got on the first camel. And he rode off, not into the sunset, but he rode off to the sunrise sitting stiff as a ramrod on his camel, in his blazer and proper dress. I

thought he had a good time, but on the way back I was riding in the car with him back to the hotel, and he looked at me and he said, "Alice, there aren't many things that a senator of my age and my travels can find very interesting, but this morning was very special!" [laughter]

One more little vignette. We did get a chance to meet and see Mother Teresa in Calcutta, where she lived, when we visited the consulate in Calcutta. I was very impressed with her because she didn't, to me, exude an aura of spirituality as much as she looked like a very efficient, very practical, down to earth, little, old lady who accomplished all these things. My husband knew that when he went in, she was going to go after him because she wanted the United States to grant special visas to her nuns who were traveling to the States; and she couldn't understand why we had to charge her money for them. She wanted to have free visas, which, of course, our State Department said no because if we did it for every charity that was visiting this would be very difficult. Nevertheless, as soon as we sat down, she looked at him with bright eyes and she said, "Mr. Ambassador, I have a problem with you!" [laughter] And he explained the situation. He said, "I'm very sorry, but this is my government's point of view," and she attacked him again! [laughter] I was just quite amazed. Somehow along the line she said, "I never accept any money from governments. Never!" Even though we had seen in the courtyard some bags of food. She accepts food, but she never accepts any monetary gifts, anything that would limit her ability to do what she thought was important. And we said to her, "How do you get money?" And she said, "I never ask for money. I never ask for money. It just comes." She said that two days before we had been there a young Hindu couple had come in after their marriage and they wanted to donate the money from the marriage to her, and just gave it to her. And she said, "The money just comes." So I was quite impressed with her.

In any case, we stayed in India such a short time, and my husband was asked to go to Russia. Again, our whole history in the Foreign Service has been to go places that we never, ever expected to be. Russia was certainly one of the greatest shocks because up until recently, most of our career ambassadors to Russia have been Sovietologists, very experienced people who speak Russian and have spent many years in the Eastern world. So, this, for us, was another enormous challenge; and yet, again, it was the closing of some kind of an experience because my husband's very first appointment in the Foreign Service, our first overseas post, was to Geneva in 1962, to the 18-Nation Disarmament talks, where the first test ban treaty was negotiated. And here we were, forty some years later, yes, almost forty, 1993, we are going to Russia at the end of the Cold War. We still hadn't quite realized the impact of the end of the Cold War. We had begun to realize it in India, begun to realize what was happening in countries outside of Russia, who were relaxing their ties with the Soviet Union, were beginning themselves to reform their economies. India had a very socialist economy that they were beginning to free up, to invite expatriate business, and to give opportunities for a freer economy. And we arrived in Russia at a very, very interesting time economically as well as politically; and we saw the resurgence of ties with the West that hadn't been seen since perhaps, the early '30s or maybe even before the First World War.

It was enormously exciting, but if anybody says that life in the Foreign Service gets easier. . . In other words, if you've had one ambassadorial post or two or three or as many as we had, you would think it would get easier; but the challenge of our lives is that it doesn't get easier. Every single country is different. Every single challenge is different. Both India and Russia are large posts, very large in numbers in our embassy, unlike other posts. That in itself was a challenge. The number of agencies that were pouring in to work with Russians. There had never been AID before. There had never been any of these more usual relationships. That had started, of course, shortly before we came, but I think that in the the three years we were there we had the full scope of this blossoming relationship at the end of the Cold War. And frankly, we were constantly amazed, always, that we were actually seeing the end of the Cold War because we'd spent our entire Foreign Service career in the battle zone, starting with Africa where it was hot and heavy in Cold War days, and then suddenly, it was disappearing! I think, in a way, it was rather important but probably not deliberately planned, that a person such as my husband, who was not ever in the milieu of the Soviet days, was chosen to go, because we both had totally fresh eyes. We found that even some of the Americans in our embassy, our colleagues who had spent their entire career in the East, Eastern Europe and Russia, found it as difficult as some Russians to free themselves of the viewpoint always of the old Cold War days.

Q: They hadn't known anything else.

PICKERING: No, of course not. And the Russians didn't either. But this constant amazement! For example, we were able to travel, and this was, for us, wonderful because cities that had been closed to foreigners for all those years of the Soviet era were open. We established a consulate in Vladivostok the year we arrived in '93. Vladivostok was a closed city. No one, no foreigners were allowed in or out. Certainly a lot of Russians were not allowed to go to Vladivostok. All of a sudden we were allowed and able to travel. It wasn't just travel for travel's sake: this was seeing and talking to people who hadn't ever had contact with the West in many, many years.

I remember one of the first trips we took to Lake Baikal and to Ulan Ude, which was on the other side of Lake Baikal than the capital, Irkutsk. I was walking down the street and it suddenly struck me that a woman of my age who lived in this town, had been born and raised in this town of Ulan Ude, which was a missile manufacturing city so it was a very defense oriented city and had been closed for a long time, would never have even seen a foreigner on their street. Maybe some East Europeans, but certainly not someone from the West as I was just walking down the street and looking at the houses because they had old wooden houses that were very fascinating and interesting to me. I thought, "My goodness! What do these people think of me? There's never been anybody." And I couldn't get over that the whole time we were in Russia. People would say in some of the town we visited, "Oh, we've never seen an American ambassador before." At first we were proud of ourselves because we were traveling and getting out of Moscow, and then we realized, "Of course not because no one was ever allowed to go before!" We had that

wonderful experience all over Russia and, of course, the challenge to try to impart to Russians in a very delicate situation that we were not coming to tell them what to do, we were not the conquerors. We were there to assist and help them make the transition. The younger the people, the easier it was. It was very discernible in some cities. The hard-line ex-Communists still found it very difficult to change, of course, whereas younger people were able, I think, and more willing and ready to understand, perhaps, the need for making a change. But it was always very delicate because when I first went to Russia, the first year, I always, wherever I am in a new situation, asked a lot of questions. It's the only way to learn, so whenever I was on any occasion with Russians I would start asking about education systems and the medical system, etc., to try to understand how the country worked. In that first year I think almost always, every time I would ask a question, just a simple question, such as explain the education system to me, the Russians would immediately say, "But we are still a great country." That always prefaced everything. So I began to understand, and I did try to explain to a lot of visiting Americans, that Russians were not only going through an economic and political trauma. They were also psychologically traumatized by the loss of their empire, the loss of their psyche of being a great country, the fact that all their satellite countries had pulled off and were gladly being independent. It was a blow to their pride and, therefore, I always felt, and I think people in the embassy who were working with Russians on an official level also felt, that it was very difficult not to offend that pride in our relationships. A lot of people who visited from Washington didn't quite understand that because they were looking only at the political and economic situation. They couldn't sense this psychological problem that all Russians had. It wasn't just old-line, hard-line Communists. I think Russians are a very proud people and they were suffering a great deal.

I've got to mention the fact that in addition to learning quickly, trying to cope with all of the new things that were going on in Russia, we were a very high profile post, more than any other place we'd ever been. We were inundated with official visits of the highest level. I think only once in our whole career of forty years a President had ever before visited a post we were in. Vice President Bush did visit three or four times in various posts we had been. But in Russia in three years we had three visits from President and Mrs. Clinton, four visits from Vice President and Mrs. Gore, who were accompanied, because of the Gore-Chernomyrdin commissions, usually with at least six cabinet secretaries: Agriculture, Defense, Health and Human Services, Energy, Commerce, Treasury. These were all the highest level people in our government, all coming with their staffs, their entourages. I look back now and I often wonder how we coped because we often had overlapping advance teams, one after the other. People in our embassy gave up Christmas vacations, whatever. The stress level was extremely high, although we realized how important it was. I think, unfortunately, observing all this that our government has become more imperial. At some times I complained. I said the Russians are freeing themselves of bureaucracy and we're tying ourselves up in knots with bureaucracy! [laughter] With a presidential visit we would have a pre-pre-advance team, a pre-advance team, and an advance team before the President came, each group taking at least a week, each group going over all the plans a thousand times that were often

changed. Many of them were volunteers and therefore, they were not experienced. It was really an eye-opener to me of how difficult it is to arrange these trips. The President would arrive with six or seven hundred people. That includes a press plane, but our USIA people had to assist the press, too. The Vice President with all these cabinet secretaries, three or four hundred people. It was mind boggling! In addition to coping with all of this, we had no FSNs [Foreign Service Nationals].

I don't know if you remember an incident before Gorbachev years when the Russians pulled out all their Foreign Service national employees from our mission in Moscow. When we arrived it was beginning to change, but in our embassy we only had something like twenty or twenty-five Foreign Service Nationals. Anybody in the Foreign Service who's been in any post knows how valuable, almost indispensable, Foreign Service Nationals are. What had filled the gap in Russia in an unusual situation was that our government had had to hire through an American company Americans, but not very many, to fill in as drivers, working in General Services, working in budget and fiscal, all the basic parts of the embassy. This was a private firm with a contract with our government to hire Americans who spoke Russian. It went down to the custodial level. The janitors were Americans. Now this was a very special problem and it was not easy to deal with. India--we had just left--had 1500 Foreign Service nationals. So you can imagine going to a post with a high-level profile with so few local people, drivers even, expeditors at the airport. This added to the stress level because every Foreign Service Officer, in addition to his normal duties with guests, would have to be schlepping the suitcases!

But I think the morale was good because everybody realized the importance of these visits.

Q: How many of these people did you have actually staying with you at Spaso House?

PICKERING: We did not have any, fortunately for me, because--and actually it started before we came--the Presidents travel with so many people, even their personal doctor and security, that they much prefer to be in a hotel where they could take over a whole wing. By the time we arrived in Russia there were several hotels. One had American management. They preferred to stay there, which was very fortunate because we always had a lot of the entertaining to do, such as the big receptions and other events for them.

We had a lot of representation to do because in addition to the President and the Vice President, we had many other high-level visitors such as every head of the armed forces, the Director of NASA, etc. Whenever they came on an official visit we would do the representational events at Spaso House because of the nature of the Moscow embassy. Unlike India, where every counselor of embassy and the defense attaché had a big house and lots of servants and were able to do their own representation, in Moscow, as most people know, they were all living on the embassy compound. The housing for even the high-level members of our embassy, the normal people who would be responsible for a lot of the representation, had very small houses: only ten for dinner, forty for a cocktail.

It was very limited, maybe not in Soviet days, but it certainly was at a time when they could entertain Russians in their homes and when they had their officials coming. So it devolved on us that more entertaining was done at Spaso House probably than at any other embassy residence that I've ever been in.

Q: You had a Russian staff there.

PICKERING: No, no, we did not because, again, all the Russians employees had been withdrawn. We had an expatriate staff, but we had hired two new Russian women who were responsible for cleaning the downstairs. They were very nice, elegant women so that they also helped serve at dinners and lunches, so we didn't have to hire as much outside help. Otherwise, we had an Italian chef, an Italian couple--one was the butler, one was the upstairs maid--and Filipinos in addition to these two young Russian girls. The aim eventually will be, of course, to go back to maybe having more Russians. It would be easier because our government doesn't make it easy to hire expatriates.

Q: Who helped with your guest lists?

PICKERING: Well, it was a very big management responsibility, and I participated fully.

..

Q: . . .as a volunteer.

PICKERING: Yes, of course, totally volunteer. It was the only post where we had a fulltime, paid house manager. There were two in my time there, one a young man and then a young woman, who were Americans working in Russia, both of them for hotels, that we were able to offer employment. So I had a fulltime house manager who worked with the staff and with the chef, but I met with her every single day and participated in everything, planning the menus and so forth. In addition to the house manager we had a fulltime protocol secretary hired by the embassy as PIT [part-time, temporary] employee. The first two were American spouses and the third one. . . There was no spouse available who wanted to work the required hours because the protocol person had to be there at all representational events, night, noon, and breakfast! Hopefully, not too many weekends. Not too many spouses were willing to do that job for a PIT salary, but we found a young expatriate American woman who was willing to take this on. With her as the central point, of course, our guest lists were generated by the sections of the embassy. If there were a big reception for President Clinton, each section of the embassy would put in the names of people that they thought were important to have. That was a most difficult job, and we managed to get a computer at the residence hooked into the embassy computer. After three years, we had a computerized master guest list with names, addresses, and phone numbers so that every 4th of July, when we had three thousand people or more to invite, we could do it more easily.

At the beginning, when I arrived in May and said, "What about the 4th of July?" the embassy said, "Well, we don't know." I said, "Where's last year's guest list?" They hadn't

even kept it! So, as a librarian, I left wonderful files when I left. I don't know if people will use them, but we really tried to make it as professional as possible. This young lady arranged to have the invitations written. We had people who wrote in calligraphy. The delivery in Russia is very difficult. We had to pay to have them. . .

Q: Cyrillic alphabet?

PICKERING: We had some of our invitations in Cyrillic and some in English; we did both. They had to be delivered personally; the mail system didn't work. It cost a lot of money. She, of course, received all the regrets, acceptances if we got them. We did seating charts. I always participated in seating charts because I usually knew the people and knew how important it is whom to sit where. She would do the basic chart and then I'd say, "That person doesn't sit by that person; they don't like each other!"

I want to say very clearly, because we've done this in all our career and I want to emphasize it, that in addition to the official things you have to do with visitors or to meet your counterparts or whatever, Tom and I have always been interested in cultural events, other kinds of events at the Residence. Maybe that's because I was a USIA officer. I don't know. And we'd try to work not only with the USIS but with other groups in the community that might want to have an event at our house to which we could invite the host country people. I always felt that we should also use the residence to show American culture as well through Art in Embassy, of course, but also in other ways, if you have a visiting musician, if you have anything that you can sponsor at the house. So, in addition to the official requirements we were always trying to do other kinds of events so that we could invite a wider group of Russians. Otherwise, you get tied into asking the same ministers, the same officials over and over. The Russians were very hierarchical.

I remember the first visit of President Clinton. Of course, he was entertained at the Kremlin. Then it was his turn to reciprocate. He said, through his people to us, that he wanted to meet young Russians and he wanted only about thirty of them and he wanted to be able to have a chance to have them come for a small reception to be able to talk more freely. We had to say very clearly, "Mr. President, we're very sorry, but we can't do that. They will not be allowed to come." We could pick out thirty really good people from different branches that you might want to exchange ideas with, but their seniors will not allow them to come unless they are invited.

I had a sad experience in one case when Mrs. Gore came. Mrs. Gore wanted to have a representative group of Russian women, and I was new and I was given names and we picked people from different sectors. One was a young woman who had written something for the new constitution that had something to do with human rights. And we thought, oh, she'd be great! And she spoke English, too. There was always the language problem when you had visitors in Russia. We tried to get a combination to avoid using too many interpreters. We invited her. She was known to the embassy, but she called and said she was not allowed to come because her office director was not invited, which gave me a clue right off that all those invitations were read by somebody when they went

to the ministries. It was very carefully controlled: they didn't just come; they had to have permission to come. And we said, "You weren't invited for your job now. It was for what you did in writing this for the constitution." And she said, "But I can't come." We said, "We'll be happy to invite your superior at another event." But she was never allowed to come.

So a lot of things like that happened in the beginning with our entertaining that made me realize we had to do certain things that fit in with Russian hierarchical ideas. So our President never got to meet a lot of the young people he probably would have enjoyed a lot more than officials, but we simply could not do it.

Therefore, we tried to do other types of events where we could entertain Russians that were not in officialdom. I think every ambassador tries to do this, but we had a wonderful house.

I want to mention that Spaso House is a historic house for Americans. It has a lot of history and a lot of architectural features that were very conducive to the best kind of representation. I loved the house. In fact, one of the things I did was to go through the information about the house that I could locate. There was sort of a mini-library in the house. I found files here and there, and I found a big file in the embassy about the house, with everything that had been written about Spaso House in magazine articles and newspapers, including an excellent interview that Rebecca Matlock wrote for the Foreign Service Journal. There were many memoirs in this library that people who had lived in Spaso House had written. Mrs. Kirk, whose husband, Admiral Kirk, was sent to Russia right after the Second World War, and is the mother of Roger Kirk, who is a retired Foreign Service Officer and ex-ambassador, wrote a very charming memoir of their time in Russia. I even found Marjorie Merriweather Post. A recent biography of her mentions the time when she went to Russia with her then husband, Joseph Davies.

I tried to collect everything I could, which was a challenge for me, and I learned as much as I could about the architecture, too. One of the special things I read in the files were some, unpublished parts of letters or memoirs from George Kennan. He described how he went in 1933 with Ambassador Bullitt, our first ambassador after we recognized the Soviet Union, as his interpreter and aide and general administrative officer. He went with Bullitt when the Soviets agreed to select a residence. They were given two houses that they could choose from. Bullitt selected Spaso House and Kennan negotiated the lease, did the work on the lease. Then he also lived in Spaso House in a small, separate apartment and tells many tales of the house. They're really marvelous. I think somebody should put it all together and publish it someday because the house, for us, for the American Foreign Service, is very memorable. It's the only house we've had in Moscow because before the Revolution our embassy was in St. Petersburg and a great number of distinguished American ambassadors have lived there. That was sort of a special little thing that I tried to do while I was in Moscow.

I'd like to tell about just two really special events.

Q: Is all that material in Spaso House? Or did you bring it back here, or where is it?

PICKERING: I brought copies of a lot of things I could copy. The books are there, although I did find a copy of a famous one called Bears in the Caviar.

Q: Oh, yes. Charles Thayer.

PICKERING: Thayer.

Q: He was Avis Bohlen's brother.

PICKERING: That's right. And I found a copy of that book somewhere that I bought and still have it. It was an extraordinary period in our relationship with Russia, from 1933 to 1936 when Kirov was assassinated and the purges started. There was a short period of good relations when Ambassador Bullitt gave wonderful parties at Spaso House, and this book was written by Charles Thayer, who was a young Foreign Service Officer at the time. It is a humorous book, but he also tells about the trials and tribulations of living in Russia, some of which we still have in Russia, and about the great Christmas ball of 1933.

It was a Christmas Eve ball for which Bullitt, who was a wealthy businessman and who had a lot of money, hired animals from the zoo to entertain. One of them was a set of trained seals. The seals came in with their trainer, who got drunk on vodka. At the time they were to perform the seals got loose and ran through the house while the guests screamed, and Charles Thayer's unpleasant job was to try to round them up and get them out!

The second thing that happened was the trained bears. The bears also decided to misbehave. I think there must have been a lot of vodka flowing. But there were lots of Russians there. It was a period when we were great friends. One of the bears went up to a Russian general, who was in full uniform, of course, and the bear, unfortunately, let go all over the Russian general, who was infuriated and he stomped out. The Americans were very worried because he was a very high level general, but they took the bears out and, believe it or not, at about four in the morning, the general reappeared in another clean uniform [laughter] because parties in those times went on all night.

I've also got to mention something of literary significance associated with Spaso House,, which I discovered. I've traced it and have records of it because a lot of memoirs are being published now, in the '90s, or after Gorbachev, that for years were not allowed to be published in the Soviet Union. There were many interesting things for me to read, a lot of them written by widows of literary people who had been sent to the labor camps or were executed. This concerns a novel which is now very famous called The Master and Margarita by Mikhail Bulgakov. It was not published until the 1990s, although written in the 1930s, and his widow kept the manuscript. A book of memoirs, Manuscripts Don't

Burn, was published with excerpts from her diaries and from his of events that happened in the 1930s. His complete work was suppressed and never published until, as I say, the 1990s. But in these diary entries it's evident that a young American Foreign Service Officer at that time in Moscow by the name of Bohlen, Charles Bohlen, Chip Bohlen, had befriended the Bulgakovs. Bohlen was trying to meet a lot of the literary people, and he invited the Bulgakovs to the spring party at Spaso House in 1934. This was the second famous ball at Spaso that became legendary.

The Bulgakovs write in their diaries that they didn't have any proper clothes to wear and they had to go and round up formal clothes. They went to this second famous party at Spaso House, and at that party they saw some more fabulous things. A pasture with live sheep grazing had been recreated. Live birds were tied in nets in the grand hall. Things were very extravagant in those days. We know from the published diary entries that they did attend this ball and were very amazed! The literary significance of it is that Bugakov wrote two or three drafts of this famous novel, and he went home from the 1934 party and rewrote a draft that is now the published draft, in which the famous scene of Margarita. . . This is a Faustian story, The Master and Margarita, and Satan's ball is taking place. Margarita comes to the ball, and if you read the scene, the ball is in a great hall with tall white pillars. There are birds in nets. And she comes down a grand, winding stairway into the ball, exactly as it exists at Spaso House.

So, Spaso House not only entered into political fame in Russia, in Moscow, but it is now enshrined in one of the masterpieces of the 1930s. I discovered all this because I was attending a literary group, a book group, and as I researched Bulgakov, I started finding all these allusions to Spaso House. That was very exciting to me.

While we were in Moscow we found that it was important with the disparate embassy that we had, with many different agencies, that once a month we would invite to our house everybody who was new in the embassy regardless of where, what agency, or anything: communicators, Marines, secretaries, whatever. We would usually have a group of about twenty or so. In the summer when there were more people, we'd have two. We would have them over to the house so that we could meet them, but also, I got confident enough that I decided it was very important for these people in the embassy to know about the history of Spaso House. I wanted them to be able to answer questions about the house because Russians were very curious and a lot of them had not been there before and so they always had lots of questions. I gave everybody a full tour of the house, the kitchens, the basement, the elevator, to the roof (not the total roof), even the outside of the house, and told them the history of the house itself, the architecture; gave them the history of our participation, of the American Embassy there, and a lot of the events that had happened there. I was determined that every person who worked in our embassy would know what this house meant, how important representation is to the mission of the embassy. I even got a few things in about that: why it was important when they came, why we were doing this, why we were given money to have what a lot of them would consider just parties, you know, and lots of fun. Our own people often don't understand the relationship of an official residence, where the ambassador seems to be living in great

splendor and they're just invited to come, and why and how closely it's attached to the mission of the total embassy. It was good to include the house as part of it and I had never had a house that ever would fit into this mode. So I was very happy living in Spaso House; it was the thing that made me happiest about Russia.

Q: Did you still have a dacha?

PICKERING: Yes, we did.

Q: That was interesting. There's an interview with Fanny Chipman that you would like to read at the AAFSW office; and she was there in the 1930s. Must have been the same dacha.

PICKERING: Yes, with Bullitt. Might have been because it's old and decrepit at this point, and people don't use it as much. We had a dacha that was given to the embassy by Stalin as a recreational place outside of Moscow because, as I mentioned earlier, people were not allowed to go beyond a 25-mile perimeter, with a few exceptions, of course--if you were going to St. Petersburg or something like that. It was in exchange for our allowing the Russians to have a recreation facility also.

Over the years, the dacha is not being used as much because we can travel outside of Moscow now. Anybody in the embassy, if they wish, could drive and see cities on the Golden Ring. They only have to give a note in; it's not asking for permission. But anybody can travel. They can go by train. They can fly. We have consulates all over the country. So I think there's not an urge to get out of the city and go to a dacha. There are plenty of places in the countryside where there are facilities to go to for recreation. The dacha is not run by the embassy any more; it's run by the Recreation Association, so it's not very lavish; it's really rustic. Some people like it a lot, and my husband and I considered it a retreat and we enjoyed going to the dacha whenever we could, but a lot of people don't any more.

Q: It isn't as much of an outlet.

PICKERING: No.

Q: That's all they had in the '30s. That was the one place where Fanny Chipman said if the dacha is bugged, the Russians know all there is to know [laughter] because that's where we let our hair down. But that was all that they had.

PICKERING: That's right.

Q: She also mentioned a very elaborate party.

PICKERING: Well, she must have been there!

Q: Yes. She said, "I've never worn so many low-cut gowns." [laughter] At one point the person who laundered the white, starched dress shirts disappeared so they had to send the shirts out to Riga.

PICKERING: Oh, yes! Oh, yes! In fact, I think not long before I came people were sending their dry cleaning out. But in the three years we were there, the town of Moscow and St. Petersburg--but I'm not sure much further than that--were completely transformed in terms of facilities: dry cleaning, food stores. All western food stores, German, Swiss, Irish, opened with everything you could imagine. The markets. . . No longer did you have to get fresh fruits and vegetables from Helsinki. We had things from Central Asia, from Israel, from Europe. It was free market, free enterprise in that sense. Lots of nice restaurants. Of course, McDonald's, which you've heard about. And, of course, the problem was that it was expensive, but Russians were doing a little better economically in the cities than they are now, so I understand some of these places have closed, I'm sure. But we were there when everything was booming and there was access to so many things that you couldn't believe what it must have been like even ten years before when people still stood in line and things were not available. They only had special stores for diplomats in those days. All of that changed dramatically by the time we got there and proceeded to improve the whole time.

Q: Fanny talked about the Russians wrapping newspapers around their feet for shoes, and that the Army wives were the ones who had boots, but everybody else had nothing and would disappear. Her language teacher disappeared and would not be seen again.

PICKERING: Well, I can believe it because that's what all the memoirs and everything I read show. We lived very close to a famous street called the Old Arbat, which is the walking street now, and from the time I arrived in 1993, I used to walk there and I never saw a Russian without boots. I never saw a Russian without a decent winter coat. I mean some had fur and some had just wool, but I never saw, except for some derelict alcoholics, anybody that was not decently clothed in the wintertime, which surprised me because I had heard stories about that. But even by '93 things had improved.

I noticed something else, and these are little subtle things that anybody who lives overseas gets to know. When we first went there, the women's hair was the traditionally dyed henna, obviously no good hairdressers. The old days when people brought lipsticks and cosmetics in, of course, were gone. And within two or three years you never saw that red henna dye. Suddenly, personal appearances improved, especially the younger generation. Estée Lauder was the first western business to open in the old GUM. Anyone could buy their products or l'Oréal. All the western cosmetic companies are there, and Russian women are very attractive. I noticed that within two years of the time we were there what a dramatic improvement in just personal care.

Q: When I was there in 1974, in Moscow in the summertime--now admittedly, there were a lot of people from the provinces who had come in to see the capital--I couldn't figure out if the women had done it on purpose or whether they could only buy a little, tiny bit of

dye. A part of their hair would be orange; this part would be bleached platinum; this part would be pink; this part would be untouched. They were the weirdest looking women I have ever seen! And I don't know whether that was intentional or not.

PICKERING: I think it was probably not intentional. Products for hair care were not available, and that's what people used to smuggle in as gifts. And I think this is something I realized: that the Russian Empire was built on the backs of the people. There was no concern for the ordinary person. Their apartments, their kitchens, their facilities, their medical facilities for the ordinary person were appalling by our standards and still are. I mean, they've never recovered. I also realized that unlike us, in a way, the Russian system was more hierarchical. Every amenity was for the top level only. There was a western-style wing of the hospital that was probably as good as ours, but nobody other than top Party officials and families had anything near that. You can go down the line. I also realized--this is a very subtle point, but I think it's important--what a tremendous hold, political hold, this had, the government had, on their people because if you were in the Foreign Ministry at a high level, for example, you had special schools for your children, special shops. You had a car. You had a driver. You could have clothes made in special areas. If you got one step out of line and lost that job, you lost everything and your wife lost everything and your family and her family lost everything, and your children would no longer go to any good schools. That was it. What a tremendous hold! Can you imagine? How many of us would step out of line if you knew what the consequences were?

One of the most fulfilling things for me personally and educationally came about through the International Women's Club which had what were called interest groups to join. There were hundreds of them. I joined the literature group which read Russian literature (in English, alas) once a week, and another group called Architectural Walks. For three years, once a week, we walked--rain, snow, sleet, whatever--the streets of Moscow and studied architecture, which, of course, ties into history. Literature tied into that. And I began to understand after a few years what Russians are all about from reading their literature: reading the great ones and the minor ones from the beginning through the '30s. I really began to understand the people. I'd never intensively done that before in another country, but it was partly because in Russia we were still fairly isolated from Russians. Russian women are all working. There was no other way you could break in without the language to learning so much. So I found that was my own personal satisfaction to have learned so much, especially since I'm a librarian by profession.

That doesn't mean that I really liked it very much. Russia is very difficult. Russians are very obdurate people with a great sense of pride. It was not easy to make friends or to get close to Russians I found. My entry into understanding about the country was through the cultural levels with intensively, every week, spending time, doing research, writing papers. We wrote our own research and did our own papers, so that was a very fulfilling thing for me.

There's only one other little part I want to talk about. Through it I learned to appreciate

what Russian people have lived through from the beginning, from Czarist days through the Soviet days through now. They're long-suffering, but they're tough people, and I personally am very optimistic that they'll make it. I'm just sorry that they have such a chaotic time now.

There were three special events that happened while we were in Russia in addition to the more general things I've been talking about that I feel were very important at that time. The first one happened the first September and October we were there in '93, and it was a very dramatic event. President Yeltsin had been elected and the Duma was appointed. The Duma was challenging President Yeltsin. Things were very tense. Maestro Rostropovich came with the full National Symphony Orchestra and the National Choral Society to perform in Russia for the first time. It was a major cultural event. And they played the "1812 Overture" in Red Square. Things were so tense that he called my husband the week before and said "should we come?" because it looked very combative. And my husband said, "Well, if you don't come, it will really look bad. It will really look as if we're just overly concerned about this, and I think you're okay." So he came with the orchestra and chorus, and they gave a splendid concert on Red Square. It was freezing cold and snowing. President Yeltsin and his wife appeared from the gates of the Kremlin and walked over as they were ringing the bells and firing the cannons for the "1812," and it was amazing and a wonderful performance. Afterwards, we had a big reception at our house, and that was all very nice. Within two days they went on to St. Petersburg. Meanwhile, in Moscow, two days later. . .

You may remember that when the Duma challenged Yeltsin, he put tanks on the bridge and fired at the Duma, and our embassy was right in the path. We were not involved, but we were in the path of the shooting! It was decided that it was too dangerous to evacuate people out of the compound in the embassy. They might be shot at accidentally. Everybody went under cover, everybody from the houses on the compound into the gym. Now that area had not been built as a bomb shelter, but it was perfect for a bomb shelter because it was underground in the compound. The gym had gym mats. There were showers. There were toilets. The commissary was upstairs, so there was food. For two days and a night, or maybe it was two nights and three days, there were about 95 people including the children in the gym. The interesting part was, of course, that they couldn't see out or know what was going on, so television was brought in because CNN was out there taking pictures of what was happening [laughter] above the people underground!

Well, it turned out all right. Nobody was hurt, but it was kind of an exciting way to start our stay in Russia. And, of course, this tension between the Duma and Yeltsin continued, but never quite so dramatically, and we did have elections after that.

That was the beginning in '93. Then near the end of our stay in Russia there was a very significant event that we'll always remember, and that was the 50th anniversary in May, 1995, of the end of the Second World War.

I wanted to say about this one experience and then. . . I did mention about Russian women

a little bit, but I don't know if you want me to do that.

Q: You said they're all working and they're very attractive.

PICKERING: But how they're treated. . .But that's all right.

Q: A lot of them don't feel they need husbands.

PICKERING: Now, where did I leave off? Oh, I was talking about the end of the World War and how poignant that was, and I want to mention two things and then maybe a little bit about the women.

We were fortunate to be in Russia at the time of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. There were two special occasions for us in addition to the grand parade, which was held at Red Square on the actual anniversary, when Russian military paraded with the flags that were taken from the Germans when they captured Berlin. They had brought those out of storage, and they did a grand parade. That was very exciting, but the other two events were more personal that I'd like to mention.

The first one took place a year before the actual anniversary of the end of the war, in 1994 when we visited a small historical town in northwest Russia not too far from St.

Petersburg. The name of the town was Pavlovsk. It's a very ancient town full of wonderful old monasteries, old churches, and old Russian architecture, which we visited.

We were staying in the one and only hotel in town, and we suddenly noticed there were a lot of people arriving. The hotel management said they were very sorry they couldn't give us dinner that night, and we said why not? And they said they are going to have the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Pavlovsk in 1944, after the liberation of St. Petersburg when the Russian armies were going towards Germany and Berlin, liberating as they went. And we said, well, where will we eat? Well, there was nowhere to eat in town; there was one, little former Intourist hotel, but no restaurant. We persuaded the manager.

. . .We said, well, can't we just sit at a table in the back or something? Get something to eat? So he agreed, and we went down with the group that was with us and were seated actually quite near the head table, although we certainly didn't want to interfere with this liberation celebration. Here were all these older Russian men with chests full of medals, Navy and Army, and they'd had a big parade in the town. We thought it was very wonderful just to sit there and watch. They were having toasts and speeches in Russian and we were just eating our dinner.

But I noticed that one man kept looking at me across the table. I knew it was no one I knew. I couldn't understand why he was staring at me, and I finally asked the interpreter who was with us. I said, "I think that man wants to say something to me or something!" So he asked him. It turned out that this man was with a Russian Army unit that had fought, as I said, to liberate Pavlovsk, which was the first town they liberated after St. Petersburg. Then they had gone all the way through Poland and to Germany. He had met American troops in Germany, and he described how he met them. And he said to me,

"And I have never seen an American since then. You're the first American I've seen." He was just beaming! And this was the first indication to me of the good memories Russians did have of that particular time.

He had gone back to St. Petersburg after the war--Leningrad, it was--and he worked as something all these years. And we said, "What do you remember about the Americans?" He said, "I remember two things: chewing gum and chocolate." [laughter] So I guess that's what they gave to him. That meeting was very poignant, and I'll never forget that moment when he said he had never seen another American since 1944.

The second event happened the next spring, spring of 1995, in April, again, before the actual anniversary of the end of the war, but commemorating American troops meeting Russian troops on the River Elbe before the fall of Berlin, before the final end. The defense attachés at the embassy helped to arrange a huge reception at Spaso House to celebrate that memorable occasion. They searched and found Russian veterans of that meeting who were living in Moscow. They found about 20, 25 Russians, including some widows, who had fought their way and met with our troops on the Elbe. They had records of which units had been there and, of course, our Americans had records of the American units. We invited them to come. We were allowed to borrow a huge painting of this event that was in one of the Russian museums. Our Army people had found and blown up some huge photographs of the actual meeting of the troops from their archives, which we hung and arranged in the Great Hall. The program, in addition to some speeches, included an Army band from one of the American units in Germany, and the Russians supplied the Red Army Chorus, which is now privatized, but it is still a military chorus. We sent the invitations out for the anniversary date of April 17 and to our surprise on the day before the event, some of these old Russian veterans (some of them were elderly by this time) were lined up. . . came to the gate and lined up to find out if this was the right place. They were so anxious to come! On the night of the event they came, of course, with their wives and/or families, with their chests full of medals; and they came in and started looking at the photographs. Some of them found themselves in the photographs. We also had an American officer, a retired general, come who had been at the Elbe.

We talked to all these veterans and then we went in to sit down for the concert, were admiring them and speaking to them as well as we could, and suddenly I noticed that some of them were wearing American medals that had been given to them at the Elbe. And I thought to myself, I bet this is the first time that they've ever worn those medals because I'm sure they hid them away after the war [laughter] during the Stalin and later years. But that was significant. that they did save them and bring them out to wear again.

The concert was wonderful. The Red Army Chorus sang all the stirring Russian military songs, but most of the songs they knew, which was quite amusing, were from the First World War! [laughter] They sang "Over There" and some of the popular songs of the First World War [laughter]. They didn't seem to have learned any from the Second World War. I think it was the most personal event that could have happened to us as

Americans who, yes, were living at that time, but young Americans who had only a very vague memory of what the Russians had contributed to the war. When we had visited on some of our travels in Russia places such as former Stalingrad, now Volgograd, and St. Petersburg itself, I, as an American, just couldn't imagine that they had lost twenty-some million people in the war in comparison to us, and that there was a reason for their pride in their country and what they had endured at that time. I think it's rather tragic that the Cold War started so soon after that and we were estranged for so many years because there was a real, I felt, reservoir in these Russians of having been together at one time in one cause.

That was a very special event during our time in Russia. As I mentioned before, I feel that it was the closing of a circle for us from our beginning in the Foreign Service in the midst of the Cold War to this final ending on a happier note, the ending of the Cold War.

When I talk so much in my memoirs about travel it sounds as if that was the only thing we were really interested in. We did take one last trip in Russia to Central Asia, to the former Soviet republics; and we only waited till the very end because we do have ambassadors in all those countries which are all independent. We traveled to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan; and there again, we saw the beginnings of independence in new states. We visited our embassies there, although it was not an official trip, and the morale of the generally young people in these small embassies--sometimes five, six, ten people at the most, who had been living in hotels without an official residence or an official embassy--the morale was extraordinarily high, higher even than in Moscow, where people were complaining a lot of the time. It seemed like our early days in Africa, in the 1960s, when African states were becoming independent. It was a time of great optimism then. We ourselves had volunteered to go out, and in our first tour in Africa we had a consulate with about six people and little kids. At that time and now again, forty years later, I felt a great thrill and privilege to be a part of the Foreign Service.

Q: End of story! [laughter]

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Spouse: Thomas R. Pickering

Spouse's position: Political Officer, Consul, DCM, Ambassador, Assistant Secretary of State, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations

Spouse entered Service: July 1959

You entered Service: September 1954

Left Service: December 1955 (marriage; USIS, The Hague, Netherlands)

Status: Ambassador's spouse

Posts:

September 1954 - December, 1955 - The Hague, The Netherlands

(This was my own assignment as a FS Officer with
U.S. Information Agency, resigned upon marriage)

With Spouse:

1959-1962 Washington, DC, Bureau of Intelligence & Research
1962-1964 Geneva, Switzerland, U.S. Mission to the United Nations at the 19-Nation
Disarmament Conference
1964-1965 Washington, DC, Language Training (Swahili)
1965-1967 Zanzibar, Tanzania, U.S. Consulate (U.S. Consul)
1967-1969 Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, U.S. Embassy (DCM)
1969-1973 Washington, DC, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (Deputy Director)
1973-1974 Washington, DC (Executive Secretary of the Department)
1974-1978 Amman, Jordan, U.S. Embassy (U.S. Ambassador)
1978-1981 Washington, DC, Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans, Environment,
Scientific & Technical Affairs
1981-1983 Lagos, Nigeria, U.S. Embassy (Ambassador)
1983-1985 San Salvador, El Salvador, U.S. Embassy (Ambassador)
1985-1989 Tel Aviv, Israel, U.S. Embassy (Ambassador)
1989-pres New York, New York, U.S. Mission to the United Nations, U.S.
Permanent Representative

Place/Date of birth: Sharon, Pennsylvania; June 15, 1931

Maiden name: Stover

Parents:

George C. Stover, teacher
Alice G. Stover, teacher

Schools:

Sharon High School; Swarthmore, BA
Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, MA
Catholic University, MSLS (Library Science)

Profession:

Foreign Service officer, 1 year
Librarian

Date/Place of marriage: November 24, 1955; The Hague, Netherlands

Children:

Timothy R. Pickering, March 19, 1957
Margaret S. Pickering, December 28, 1959

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:

At Post (No Paid Positions):

Amman, Jordan

President, American Women's Association; Board of Trustees, American Center for
Oriental Research (Amman, Jordan)

Lagos, Nigeria

President, American Women's Association

San Salvador, El Salvador

President, American Women's Association

Tel Aviv, Israel

President, American Women's Association

Tel Aviv, Israel

Program Chair, International Women's Club - led seminar on women's issues

New York, New York

President, UN Heads of Mission Wives' Group; Board of Governors; Foreign Policy
Association Off-the-Record Luncheons; Board of Metropolitan Committee for UNICEF;

In Washington:

Regional Reference Librarian, Sherwood Regional Library, Fairfax County, VA

Honors:

BA, magna cum laude

Phi Beta Kappa

Beta Phi Mu (Librarian Honor Society)

End of interview