

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

FANCHON SILBERSTEIN

*Interviewed by: Monique Wong
Initial interview date: December 9, 1992*

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Mrs. Silberstein accompanied her husband, Manuel Silberstein, an officer of the State Department Foreign Service, at his posts abroad and in the United States.

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Syracuse University and George Washington University

Syracuse University 1978-1979

Research Assistant, Marriage and Counseling Department

Washington, DC: Coordinator, Overseas Briefing Center (OBC) 1980-1985

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Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

1974-1978

English language teacher at several institutions
Strategic Planning in special Education
Fulbright Commission
Bi-National Center

INTERVIEW

Q: This is Monique Wong on December 9, 1992. I'm interviewing Mrs. Fanchon Silberstein in Washington, DC for the Foreign Service Spouse Oral History.

Mrs. Silberstein, I'm very happy to be here. I thought we would start with your involvement in OBC, the Overseas Briefing Center. If you don't mind, could you tell me when you were there and what kind of work you were doing at the Center?

SILBERSTEIN: I came in in 1980 and left in 1985, so I was there for five years as the coordinator.

Q: That would be at the C Level or upstairs in the office?

SILBERSTEIN: We were upstairs on the fourth floor. They are still using that space now.

Q: Perhaps you can explain to me a little bit if you would of the history of OBC. When it first was established, and what was going on at that point, and what was going on when you first started working there?

SILBERSTEIN: The original establishment was under a Foreign Service officer, a woman whose name is Mary Vance Trent, and it may be somebody that you might want to interview. She's still here. She's a very interesting person. She was actually asked -- I'm not sure by whom -- whether it was the Director of the Foreign Service Institute or not -- to begin a program to train spouses. She was one of, I think, only three or four female Foreign Service officers in those years -- you'll have to check the years.

Q: So she was the first person involved with the Overseas Briefing Center.

SILBERSTEIN: That's right. And I think it was just called the Wives' Course in those years. It was a two week program that essentially focused on the spousal role. But I do believe that it was as early as that that she had the idea that there should be what we are now calling the American Studies Component covering such subjects as the economy, the political situation, American literature and art -- the kinds of things that people are better off knowing if they're going to speak for our country when they go overseas.

Q: So from the beginning there was the cross-cultural component there?

SILBERSTEIN: Well, I suppose that's one way you could characterize it, but it wasn't really cross-cultural. It was teaching about the United States before one went abroad. Instruction about the country of assignment was carried out by Area Studies.

Q: I see. So the Wives' Course was one that focused on the American Studies. The things that you should know...

SILBERSTEIN: What we're now calling American Studies.

Q: Right. But at the time the focus was on things about America before you went overseas.

SILBERSTEIN: Exactly. In addition to protocol and entertaining.

Q: And they were one week? Two weeks course?

SILBERSTEIN: I think it was two weeks.

Q: So this lady, Mary Vance Trent, she was in charge of the course?

SILBERSTEIN: She was the Foreign Service officer who was asked to do this.

Q: Okay. But then there wasn't really an Overseas Briefing Center yet?

SILBERSTEIN: No. That was all there was. Just this course, and she created it.

Q: I see. Then what happened after that?

SILBERSTEIN: She was at FSI on a rotation assignment and then she of course went overseas again. The next person who came in, I believe, was Dorothy Stansbury. And again, you can check this with the archives in the OBC.

Q: I have heard of the name.

SILBERSTEIN: She ran, I think, a similar course, and expanded its base a little bit. I remember way back when she was there being asked to attend a meeting in the early '70s when they were re-integrating female Foreign Service officers who were married and had had to give up their commission. There were some questions about the role of women in those years.

After Dorothy Stansbury, Joan Wilson came in. Joan did an enormous amount to expand the Center. In fact at that time it was still the Wives' Course and she created the Overseas Briefing Center. It didn't exist before that.

Q: I see. So this all happened after the '72 Directive where the women officers who had to resign before were beginning to get reinstated back into the Foreign Service and at the same time, the Wives' Course started to change and Joan Wilson started to establish the Overseas Briefing Center.

SILBERSTEIN: Yes.

Q: And I gather that the Wives' Course was offered at the Foreign Service Institute?

SILBERSTEIN: Yes. It started as the Wives' Course. When Dorothy Stansbury took it on it was still the Wives' Course as far as I know. And then when Joan Wilson took it over, the Overseas Briefing Center became an entity similar to but different than it is now. There was then a place where people could come to use the visual material and the written material to prepare themselves for overseas life.

But Joan did a lot more than that. She established a number of other courses, many of which are still being offered under the auspices of the Overseas Briefing Center. In addition, the people in the office then began to train out of the Center. They provided a component in junior officer training, and another one in administrative training for the first time. The reach became broader.

Q: At that point, that would have been late '70s? Would that be right?

SILBERSTEIN: Yes, that's right. I think she was there eight years.

Q: And would that be before or after FLO was established?

SILBERSTEIN: It was before. The Family Liaison Office was created during that period. I think it was two years old when I came in 1980.

Q: FLO was two years old when you came?

SILBERSTEIN: I think it was created in '78.

Q: Yes, it was. And then you started at OBC in 1980. Okay. Let's go back to 1980 when you came here and got the job at OBC. What was available then? Where were you?

SILBERSTEIN: What was available to spouses?

Q: Right. What was available to people through the Center?

SILBERSTEIN: There were a series of courses. There was a two-week course. We changed the name to American Studies. It was composed of an American Studies component. We added some cross-cultural material and the logistical assistance, the

practical side. We offered a community skills course and one on career counseling. We did workshops on Saturdays for families to help prepare them to move abroad. On Wednesday evenings we offered workshops for couples and single people who weren't going abroad with families with children.

We started, as a result of the hostage crisis, a course that is called "Regulations, Allowances, and Finances." That was a direct response to the need that became so clear to us that when people were back here... When spouses and families were separated from the employees and there was not access to basic financial information in some cases unless they had prepared for it. And so the course filled in a lot of the blanks. How do these regulations operate? What kind of advanced planning do you need to do? We personalized it a lot. We did role plays, case studies on children, to try to make it as lively as possible.

Let's see, what else was available? We taught a course in teaching English as a Second Language. USIA used to send a representative over to teach that so that the spouses who wanted it would have a base -- it was only a one-week course but it was very well taught - - on how the audio-lingual method worked, how materials could be made available to them. This gave them some possibility for working overseas.

In addition, we had any number of informal meetings with spouses. We were actively involved with ambassadorial training with ambassadors and spouses together, and then special sessions for spouses and also for deputy chiefs of mission and their spouses, and then separately for the spouses.

We started the AWAL program. Around the World in a Lifetime. We brought in children and other people who were experienced in this -- adults as well. The kids were the ones that really decided that they wanted the organization. Phyllis Habib was at that time at the Family Liaison Office and she really, with her energy, made it happen, because it needed somebody who would really keep going with the kids. That led to more and more things and it's still going on, happily.

Q: Yes. It sounds like all of these programs that you mentioned are still going on strongly ...

SILBERSTEIN: I think many of them are, yes.

Q: ... at the OBC.

SILBERSTEIN: Now a lot of these evolved, you know. They were not started by me. They were started either by Joan or by Dorothy Stansbury or an idea would evolve. We started the "Regulations, Allowance and Finance Program" because of the hostage crisis and then we drew upon other programs and expanded them.

Q: Yes. Tell me where you were located and how much space you had and who was

working with you at the time?

SILBERSTEIN: Well we were still where the fourth floor office is now, but that was it. The interior office had the desks of the coordinator and assistant coordinator. The outer office, which is now administrative, was the total Overseas Briefing Center. We used closet space, floor space because we had several slide projectors going and a videotape machine.

Q: So everything was in that office that we see now on the fourth floor?

SILBERSTEIN: That's right. And occasionally we would stay open in the evening for junior officers to come in. I remember especially one winter evening when maybe twenty junior officers came in with down jackets. Of course there was no place to put anything. We just made a big cushion on the floor out of all the down jackets and pushed the tables back and they just sat on the floor and read the material. Those were the kinds of constraints that we were operating under.

Q: And how many people worked there besides you? You were the director of that office at the time for five years?

SILBERSTEIN: Yes. I was the only full-time employee.

Q: You were?

SILBERSTEIN: Yes. There was a part-time assistant. We had an administrative assistant who essentially ran the Center and we'd get intermittent secretarial help, but it was rough.

Q: So there were four people in effect, but only you were full-time and the others were part-time or intermittent?

SILBERSTEIN: That's right.

Q: That sounds hard.

SILBERSTEIN: We occasionally had the assistance of a willing spouse who would come through and would take on a project or would help us out with something. Specifically, the Association of American Foreign Service Women was helpful whenever they could be. But we were really functioning under duress in those years. It was very difficult.

Q: Did you know what you were getting into when you applied for the job? Did you have a pretty good idea of what the Center was about and what you were supposed to do?

SILBERSTEIN: I think in many respects I did. I think I saw what the objective was and was very committed to the objective, which was to work with families, all families. And we worked toward that goal while I was there because the idea was to bring in more

classroom time and other time for the whole family, not just for the spouse separately.

The magnitude of the job was surprising because it kept growing. We were seeing 7,000 people a year and there was very little time for strategic planning because we were just careening from one thing to the next in order to stay ahead of the flow. We had almost no administrative back-up so it was really quite difficult sometimes to keep it going. But there was a lot of energy there!

Q: The funding, I suppose, came from FSI?

SILBERSTEIN: Yes, it was part of the FSI budget.

Q: But you also brought something special to the office, I gather, because you had a degree in cross-cultural education or something that ...

SILBERSTEIN: No, I didn't have a degree in cross-cultural education. If anything, I really began to learn about cross-cultural studies while I was there. But of course I'd been abroad a lot and I had, without knowing that I would be going into this job, been at Syracuse University for a year before coming. My husband was sent there and I studied. I wrote two papers on the issue of the Foreign Service and its families. That's not cross-cultural but it was something that gave me a focus on what I had been through. I had a lot of library time.

I became a kind of research assistant to the chairperson of the Marriage and Family Counseling Department in Syracuse. She was looking for somebody to prepare a review of the literature for a proposal she was doing to do research on human uprooting in Israel for a short period of time. I volunteered to do that in lieu of writing the traditional paper for the course since a paper on marriage and family counseling wasn't going to fit into my interests as much as this. She gave me the part-time help of somebody in her office and we went to work. It was very interesting, very fruitful. It yielded a lot of material. Not very much on the Foreign Service, but a lot on what happens to people who uproot. That was the body of one paper and the other paper was more focused on the Foreign Service.

Q: Yes, I now see that your background had been in education at that point.

SILBERSTEIN: In special education.

Q: In special education. And obviously that helps to have the teaching background and educational background when you came to work at OBC. And so what sorts of progress did you make over the five years between '80 to '85? What kind of changes and needs, perhaps, change over those years for families and officers?

SILBERSTEIN: Well it's a little hard to assess and especially at this distance because now I've not been there since 1985. We definitely expanded our base. We took in many, many more people. Our outreach into the community increased. More and more people

found out about us from the outside and the result of that was that we had a lot of visits from embassies, from business and trade associations in the office in order to find out what we were doing. The result of that was that we found out what they were doing and what the needs were. That made us more responsive, I think, in some ways.

Q: What did the companies want to find out?

SILBERSTEIN: Well mostly they wanted to know how to better prepare their employees for overseas, and also how to work more effectively with re-entry.

Q: Oh I see.

SILBERSTEIN: Re-entry was a kind of ground-breaking idea in those years. It was already somewhat in place when I came in and I myself was really fascinated with that part of the transformative process and how it goes on for a lifetime. So we did more with that.

Q: Re-entry meaning the Americans who had gone overseas and were returning back to the States.

SILBERSTEIN: Particularly the children and the older children and as a result of AWAL, they were really able to make a difference in the community. I thought that was really a very important thing to be expanded upon because there are so many issues: career, mental health, one's view of the world. The difference that one can make in the world ultimately has a lot to do with how you integrate that former experience. For young people it's especially profound.

Q: And also it helps the officers at the same time, not just the families, but trying to bring the officers together as well with the families. That was always the purpose.

SILBERSTEIN: That was always the purpose. It wasn't always possible to do that, but we tried our best. We also created the Foreign-Born Spouse Network in those years. That was another great fascination of mine. I was very glad to be able to see that start. The result of that was that not only was the network created, but ongoing informative meetings. We had several sessions on spouse abuse, on some of the shadow side of things that had not been discussed very much up until then. And the richness of what we learned during that time was really wonderful.

Q: The Foreign-Born Spouse Network. Did that evolve into the Foreign-Born Spouse Group under the AAFSW, or is that a separate group that we're talking about?

SILBERSTEIN: You know, I'm not really sure where one started and the other ended because I worked so closely with the AAFSW in those years. They supported the RAF course, the Regulations, Allowances and Finances. Jean German, who was first the assistant and later became the Director of OBC oversaw that with Penne Laingen. They

did it under the auspices of the AAFSW. So we were really working hand in glove. I don't always see a clear separation because I felt that we needed their support so much and we tried to support them as much as we possibly could.

Q: The reason I ask is that I've been trying to trace the history of this Foreign-Born Spouse Support Group as a special group under AAFSW.

SILBERSTEIN: That's where it started.

Q: So that when you mentioned that, I would like to know how it worked at that point, who was involved with that group.

SILBERSTEIN: It started in the OBC, and I can't remember which spouse was the one who I first worked with. She was a European-born spouse who was really very eager to do something. Everybody was a little shy about it. I think the fear was that it would set the foreign-born spouse apart when in fact there were real issues that needed to be dealt with, and dealing with those issues was not going to alienate these people more than they were already feeling alienated. We were able to gather data and find out some of the things that had gone on overseas, some of the suffering that foreign-born spouses had felt because they were feeling overlooked or as though they weren't making the contribution they wanted or... There were many, many things.

Q: Right. Do you suppose that this information is still at the OBC now ?

SILBERSTEIN: Oh, I can't imagine it isn't.

Q: Okay. So when does the OBC expand to the C-level office? Were you there?

SILBERSTEIN: That happened after I left when Jean German and Lee Lacy were there. And they took over, first, a small amount of just office space down there. Eventually they got more space and were able to really put in a little media center there. When the OBC took on the Security Overseas course, the SOS course, they used those offices as well for that, so there was really a great need for space.

Q: Yes. Even now it sometimes gets very busy at the C-level. When you said that they took over the SOS course, from whom did they take that over?

SILBERSTEIN: I can't remember who was running the course. It had been in more than one office. But they can tell you exactly who was responsible for it. One of the ideas in having the OBC take on the course is that there would be a family component. You probably already know Judy Ikels was very active in creating the children's portion. Barbara Hoganson, who had been the assistant director/coordinator of the Center, had the first job heading it up.

Q: Barbara Hoganson and Judy Ikels?

SILBERSTEIN: Yes. Judy was there as an administrative assistant, but she did far more. She worked closely with Barbara. She was one of the people that created new ideas, especially for the young people. There's a children's component now and an adolescent's component. And that was really under her.

Q: Since OBC is located in and also under FSI, how closely did you work with people at FSI? With whom did you work?

SILBERSTEIN: You mean other people who were working in various offices at FSI?

Q: Right. Exactly.

SILBERSTEIN: I would say it was from top to bottom. We had a close relationship with various directors, assistant directors, certainly with the heads of Area Studies. With various people in the language schools, certain people on the administrative staff.

Q: You mentioned? Do you remember what sort of weekly schedule or daily schedule you had? What kind of things you started with in the week? Did you always start with some meetings with some people or not?

SILBERSTEIN: It really depended on what the week was. If we were running a two-week course, there was always quite a lot to do to get ready for that course so the focus would be heavily there. Even though we were bringing in many outside speakers, one of us liked to be in the classroom all the time. Not only because we were monitoring speakers, but we created a little community of the people who were there for two weeks. We got to know each other very well. Many of those people came back and helped us later. They gave us feed-in from overseas when they got there. So that would be what that period of time would look like.

That didn't mean that the other work didn't go on. Training for junior officers and for other courses in the building, writing the program for the next community skills workshop that might be coming up. And I did most of my own secretarial work in those years so it meant taking the registrations, doing correspondence, answering phone calls. There were many weeks when I worked seven days a week. There wasn't any other way to get the work done.

Q: I'm sure. It's a very busy office with all the courses you offer. And trying to keep up with the registration and remind people that the classes are going and things like that. It's a lot of extra things that you don't normally think about. What about the relationship between OBC and FLO during the time you worked as the Director at OBC?

SILBERSTEIN: Well, when I came in, the office was headed up by Janet Lloyd and we had a strong feeling that we talked about and shared that we were really working toward the same goal from different ends, and I'd like to think that that continues. The Overseas

Briefing Center is the training arm. It's located in the Foreign Service Institute and therefore its role is to teach and to train and to provide materials. The function of the Family Liaison Office -- this polarizes it a little bit because there is blending -- was to concentrate on developing services overseas and really being a strong advocate in the Department for families. So those were the kind of polarized roles, but we were in constant communication about what we were doing.

And again, just to go back to the RAF course because it was a new creation, they were part of that creation. If we were doing ambassadorial training, they were part of that training. They contributed to every community skills workshop. The career counseling course was essentially run by the person who was the career counselor in the Family Liaison Office. So there was a lot of back and forth and a lot of mutual decision-making.

Q: I understand now they hire contractors -- a lot of them are spouses -- to take care of the courses. Was it like that when you were there?

SILBERSTEIN: They didn't have the system of contracting in those years. What we did was to pay a person on a speaker by speaker basis, and some of those people who came in were spouses.

Q: So you really had a lot more flexibility, perhaps, in changing, getting new people?

SILBERSTEIN: Maybe in some ways we did, but the upshot of it was that we ran all the courses because we couldn't contract that out. Happily that's changed because now they don't have to depend on their staff to run a course. If they want to have a course, they can set up a contract for it.

Q: So you're saying that actually the four of you, basically from the office -- mainly three really because the fourth person was an intermittent type of secretarial help.

SILBERSTEIN: Very intermittent, yes.

Q: And so there were three of you. And who were the other two people?

SILBERSTEIN: Jean German and Barbara Jibrin. Barbara Jibrin was the administrative assistant, but what she did was to provide secretarial back-up for us to the extent that she had time. But she also had to receive all of the visitors in the Center. All of us worked together to solicit materials overseas, but she was essentially in charge of that. And just filing the newsletters from the posts was a major component of time.

Q: It still is, I'm sure.

SILBERSTEIN: So really two of us were doing all of it, and I was the only full-time person.

Q: So you really had to run all the courses absolutely, to train, and then bring in some speakers who were mostly spouses.

SILBERSTEIN: No, they weren't mostly spouses. We used to bring back spouses for the particular skills that they had. If they were particularly adept in a certain area, we would use them. But for the American Studies component, for example, we brought in people from the media, from religious organizations. And we really drew, as they do now, on skilled people.

Q: But you ran those courses. Not that you would farm it out to a contractor and the contractor would organize the course, get the speakers. So that did not exist at all at that point.

SILBERSTEIN: It didn't.

Q: Wow! It sounds like a lot of work. Toward the end of your tenure there in 1985, what were some of the hot issues perhaps that you can remember regarding the Center?

SILBERSTEIN: Well I think the hottest issue had to do with the question of paying spouses for their work overseas. And for at least two of the years that I was there, we held regular meetings. Mrs. Eagleburger who is there now would sponsor or hold the meetings in her husband's office. I think that was probably the hottest issue. What would it mean if they were paid? How could they be paid? What sort of arrangements could be set up so that there would be recognition? We were dealing with that, too.

Q: As you explained earlier, FLO has a different kind of role so that they would be out there to express their view on all these various issues concerning spouses and families. What about OBC? Does it also have that kind of view that they can tell somebody, "This is OBC's view on this issue or that issue?"

SILBERSTEIN: I don't think it's ever been codified in that way. FLO was part of these meetings as well, and I think we all understood that they had more of the role of advocate. That they could go more directly to the administration and the hierarchy. The AAFSW was the really powerful organ in all of this and they attended those meetings, too. I don't think we've ever -- I don't know if that's going on now -- but nobody ever thought of it in quite those terms. This is our point of view. We gave support for a point of view and we encouraged things that we thought were going to be useful, helpful to families, that encouraged mental health, for example. But not in exactly the sense that you were just asking.

Q: You mentioned about abusive cases. Maybe you can tell me a little bit more about what kind of cases you encountered.

SILBERSTEIN: That was not the sort of thing that we got deeply involved in except to be very concerned. It was much more in the purview of the Family Liaison Office so that if I

did hear about something, either I would give them a call or call somebody in the Employee Assistance Center and ask for advice and see what we should do then. But we would find out about things. I think that was the main thing. And we did hold one meeting with a Korean woman who has done a lot of research and writing and who was brought here actually by the military to discuss spouse abuse. We were able to piggy-back on that.

Q: I see. I'm just curious as to how and when these cases of abuse became known. I'm sure they have always been around. When did they become more open and people start to confront them, either OBC or FLO?

SILBERSTEIN: I think the FLO can fill you in more specifically, but certainly when we started the network and began to talk to people, it seemed to open the doors. It's not that there was a flood of this. There wasn't. But occasionally a spouse would come through and confide the issue and then we would have to see what we were going to do about it.

Q: And there were child abuse cases too?

SILBERSTEIN: I never heard about any.

Q: Oh, that's good. What I'm hearing seems like there were some problems with foreign-born spouses in terms of abuse.

SILBERSTEIN: I believe that there were, but what I'm telling you is very anecdotal and it's just what I learned as a result of my close contact with certain spouses. I don't have the idea that there was a great deal of...

Q: So the office did not actually deal with that issue so it's not OBC's effort to deal with that.

SILBERSTEIN: No, we certainly didn't ignore it.

Q: No, you'd make referral and make it known to FLO. You received a Superior Honor Award. Was that for the work at OBC?

SILBERSTEIN: Yes.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit more about it? When that was awarded?

SILBERSTEIN: It was when I left.

Q: Oh, great, great. Mrs. Silberstein, I'm looking down at the places that you have served with your husband and quite a few of them were in Southeast Asia. You were in Saigon and Laos and Bangkok and so on. You also mentioned there were various types of terrorist activities while you were there. Perhaps you can tell me a little bit more about

those years and how that perhaps influenced your work at OBC?

SILBERSTEIN: I think everything influenced my work at OBC. The years in Southeast Asia -- we started in Cambodia and I was evacuated without my husband who stayed back. I was in Hong Kong for several weeks, and then I joined him later in Saigon, which was supposed to have been a safe haven and wasn't at all. Actually nothing happened in Phnom Penh when we were there, but the threat was there and that was the reason why we were evacuated.

Q: That would have been in 1963 or '64?

SILBERSTEIN: Actually at the end of '63 I left.

Q: How long were you there?

SILBERSTEIN: I was only there a year. He had been there since 1959 and we were both very happy living there. It was very sad to have been evacuated.

Q: Everybody was. I mean dependents, families?

SILBERSTEIN: That's right. Those were the people who were sent out. After three weeks in Hong Kong, it seemed like other people were having a better time than I was. I was newly married and really wanted to get back to my husband, come what may. I left and went to meet him in Saigon with only one other spouse. Every other spouse decided to stay on in Hong Kong. Some were joined by their husbands.

And then we were in Saigon on temporary duty while they decided what would be a good on-going assignment for my husband and he had a lot to do with closing out the Phnom Penh work. So that was going on. And the nature of the terrorism there was very scary because it was so unpredictable and violent. They blew up a baseball field where American youngsters played. They blew up an American movie theater. During the time we were there, zigzags of barbed wire were put in front of the embassy and all of the American installations. I used to use the American library, and I was followed with a fixed bayonet as I walked in the door, by a Vietnamese MP who was standing in front. Those things were very unnerving. And we could hear mortar fire from ...

Q: Those were particularly dangerous years during the wartime.

SILBERSTEIN: Yes, and war had not really been declared. It was difficult to assess really what was going on. And I became very anxious about the times when my husband was at the office, because the office was particularly under the possibility of attack. So it was a relief to get sent out and we went to Laos then. We were in upcountry Laos and we had potentially dangerous months, but they were really quite quiet. And that part was really all right, I guess. It was perhaps a bit too quiet in some ways.

And then from Laos we went to Bangkok and the change was very nice because we were in a big city. But again, all of these were temporary duty assignments and we were really yearning, I think, to be settled. That was one of the things that was so difficult. We were caught in civil disturbance in Vientiane where we actually were under a building for 24 hours and then sleeping on somebody's floor for a night...

Q: That was in Laos?

SILBERSTEIN: Yes. And then on somebody else's floor for another night. It was very, very unnerving. Americans were not under attack, but it didn't matter. Anybody who is in the way was going to get it.

Q: That's unfortunate. What kind of procedures or help does the embassy provide the family in these kinds of potentially dangerous situations?

SILBERSTEIN: Now I think it's much better organized. You'd learn much more from talking to people at the SOS course and at OBC and FLO about that. In those years, we just had the feeling we were doing whatever we had to do. There wasn't a known plan. Those plans that I think are very carefully laid out now in communicating to families, we didn't have.

Q: I see. How was the evacuation done?

SILBERSTEIN: The evacuation? It was very orderly because there was no violent activity. They sent out the family members and then the necessary employees stayed back to close down the mission. Household effects were loaded onto a barge and went down the Mekong. We wondered if we would ever see them again, but we did. Everything was safe.

Q: So they were shipped to what, Hong Kong, at that time?

SILBERSTEIN: Let's see, where did they go? I think they went to Bangkok where they were held for us and then they were shipped to Laos where we did unpack for a short time and then they were boxed up again and finally ended up... Let's see, what did we do with them then? Then we came back to the States after that, and later Pakistan. That was the next overseas post.

Q: We were talking about the evacuation and that your effects eventually got to you in Laos?

SILBERSTEIN: Yes.

Q: How did all these experiences that you had overseas come to influence your views when you came to work at OBC?

SILBERSTEIN: Well, as I think I said earlier, everything influenced my views when I came to the OBC. We had been in Pakistan for three years and subsequently to Southeast Asia. I had four years in Washington when I worked and got a graduate degree. I was what they called a crisis resource teacher. It was a program that was created at GW. As part of their master's program, they placed various students, and I was one of them, in schools in the area, I worked in Virginia very closely with a school administrator to encourage faculty to devise programs that were effective for children.

It was a life-changing endeavor for me. I learned something about educational systems, psychology, a lot about how people work together, about how family dynamics influence what takes place, what education can and can't do, does and doesn't do. And I think that had a big impact -- I know it did -- on what I did at the OBC because it was a systems approach to people working together in various ways.

The other thing was, by the time I came back for the job at OBC, I had been in Brazil for four years, and I saw a lot more about what family life was about, how children were functioning. I myself was working in a school, a small school in Rio that had an international clientele, and I think I woke up during those years to the profound impact of international life on children in Rio. Some of them were Brazilian children. Others came from other countries in this school. It's not that I hadn't perceived the importance of mobility before, but now I was working very closely with it and I was trying to use some of my special education skills working with the faculty, the families, the environment. And I realized how impactful all this was and how much I had to learn.

Q: Very, very interesting. We were talking about your experience overseas and how that helped your work at OBC. I'd like to know what your perspective is on the life overseas compared to the life in Washington, DC because it seems to me that OBC does offer work for preparing for overseas and also for re-entry. Perhaps you can comment on the two kinds of lives, if you will, for the Foreign Service families.

SILBERSTEIN: Can you tell me more about that question so that I'm answering in a way that will be useful?

Q: Perhaps you can characterize the overseas experiences on one hand and the Washington, DC experience on the other.

SILBERSTEIN: For spouses?

Q: For spouses, for the family, in the context of how the family adjusts to both situations, and how OBC helps these families to adjust to different situations.

SILBERSTEIN: How do the two differ?

Q: Yes. What kind of supports do you think we need before someone goes overseas or while they're overseas that OBC can prepare them for? Let's take it from there first.

SILBERSTEIN: I think that's a good way to look at it. I think that generically there's the fact of transition. It brings change and change can be profound. In dealing with transition, training, counseling and other supports must be age-specific, career-specific, so that people can understand the effects of transition on themselves and their families as specifically as possible. For a child, the questions might be: What are you leaving, what are you going to? What's school like? What skills do you carry with you? What are the fears, what are the hopes? Who's going to be there? What are you going to do about staying in touch back here? Does that matter to you? Personalize what is happening as much as possible. I'm really trying to capture a lot in just a quick moment here.

For the spouse, and the employee as well, there are a whole host of other issues that surround family life. What parents are you leaving? How old are they? What are your concerns about them? What are the attitudes of other people in the family whom you're leaving behind?

There are [a] lot of other personal issues. What are the things that you've been doing at home that are satisfying? Can you pick up on those? And then specifically where the spouse is concerned, what is life going to be like? What do you want to do or not do? What's a relief to leave? And what is going to be out there to help you begin life in a new community? How do you begin? And then what might happen later? I'm asking these things very broadly, but if you're working with a specific individual, then it's much more concrete and real in a way that we hope was really useful.

With the employee, I think one of the overall messages is that everybody in the family needs to be helpful to each other, but that nobody can adjust for anybody else.

Q: This is a very interesting point, very, very good point, and I'm glad that you brought it up. Tell me a little bit more about that, though.

SILBERSTEIN: Well I think maybe a theme that ran through our programs is that we need each other and that the community is a vital component in our ability to do any of this work overseas, be productive, and help us achieve what we want. But at the psychological level, the personal level, we all indeed do have, children too, a responsibility for our own adjustment. To the extent possible, the Briefing Center should play a very active role in encouraging that individual responsibility.

We used to try to do that in the Saturday workshops with children despite the fact that we were working with a large group of people. There was time with children separately to help them explore their own interests and needs, consider who they were in the family, how they helped and how they didn't help, what caused disruption, what made mommy upset and so on. All this was meant to help families manage overseas more effectively.

Q: But for the people who hadn't been overseas before as a representative of the U.S. Government, how do you help them understand and prepare for their first post,

especially? How do you get the officers to realize that they are responsible for their families and that they need to get information to the family and so on?

SILBERSTEIN: Well I do want to recommend that you speak to the person who currently has the contract to run the one-week course in preparing for overseas life -- Judee Blohm. Because she's a former Foreign Service spouse, she knows the life very well. It's a very lively course. I do one session in it on dealing with criticism overseas.

I think the essence of good stress management is being as specific as possible. So you really do want to teach people specific skills. You want them to understand the structure of overseas communities, that the Foreign Service functions in certain ways, what the nature of people's work is, how housing operates and so on. They should be helped to know how to formulate their questions so that they can learn exactly what it is that they need to know. Everybody is going to overlook something in this preparation process. I think that's really the upshot of it, preparation training: getting people ready to ask their questions coherently and in a useful way for them.

Then there needs to be time for self-exploration: who am I now? what am I going into? what is this life likely to be for me? Class time should be somewhat open-ended.

Q: For you personally, for example, did it get easier over the years as you make the next move, or did you go through the same momentum of, "Oh, got to make the move again. Got to do all this." And there is change. How did that happen to you?

SILBERSTEIN: I don't think it gets easier, but it gets different. You're different every time you go out. There were some things that are less trying because you've done them before. You can repeat certain actions more effectively. You can be less afraid of some of the things that were incomprehensible in the beginning. But at every stage of the game, of your life, you bring new interests, new concerns. So that I wouldn't say that it got easier. It just got different. Every post was really very different, not so much because of the post but because of me, or because of the life stage.

Q: Is that the observation that you have of other families as well? That it doesn't necessarily get easier, just different problems arise, perhaps, or different emphasis or priorities at different points in the service?

SILBERSTEIN: Yes, I definitely think that's true. When children come into the picture, it's a different picture. When parents age, it's a different picture, so those things influence adjustment. There are good things and career snags that take place that create stress.

Q: That's true. I hadn't thought about that!

SILBERSTEIN: Sometimes for me it was relatively smooth, sometimes not smooth, and I couldn't say that it was easier at the beginning than at the end or the other way around. Some things got more difficult.

Q: What about the other part of the question I asked earlier? That is the re-entry that we touch on. How is that different from preparing somebody for overseas? Now you're dealing with the people coming back. How is that different? Why is it different?

SILBERSTEIN: Well I think, just to back up a little bit, that re-entry really should be part of the preparation to go overseas. We shouldn't prepare for a one-way street. You don't reach a dead-end, we know, of course. I think there should be some awareness of the ongoingness of these moves and their impact including re-entry.

I think there are many differences and many similarities with the return. One of the big differences is that re-entry is not a clearly defined entity of time. It goes on. And for some people it's not painful at all. They come back; they're delighted to be back. There are lots of opportunities to draw on their overseas experience they kind of flow right into it. There may be some longings for friends or experiences that they've had. For others it's an amputation, a loss of identity and takes some real struggle and hard work to come back to being oneself. Overseas life in some posts for some people is relatively structured. There's an expectation of a certain role that's hooked into the employee's role. You're entertaining interesting people and you feel the certain vitality and participate in activity that drops away when one is home.

Sometimes you go overseas and have a host of problems to solve about running a household and other things that we deal with. Sometimes domestic life is difficult in the U.S. without help. People face additional expenses and schooling issues. Those kinds of things, I think, impact a lot. But the lack of structure seems to affect a lot of people when they return and they have to go through a morass of new information.

We came back to the United States in 1978 when there were a few little technological changes that I look back on now with amusement. They were mildly frustrating so I can be amused. I had never seen a modular phone. When we left, you called up the phone company and they installed the phone. When we came back, you went to the phone company and got a phone and put this thing in the wall. It was just puzzling. A computer was something that I thought very few people owned and I suppose in 1978 that it was true. You didn't see a lot of PCs. But during the time that we were back, they did begin to flow in. So there were numbers of things to learn.

I was about to look for a job and I'd never prepared a résumé. It had not been necessary when I'd left the U.S. and I scarcely knew what that was all about. There were many things and then I think the perception is that everybody knows more than you do. When you go overseas, there is an attempt, even if it's not real well organized, to integrate you. There are groups created to help you learn how to adjust to a new setting. You come back here and you pretty much have to find groups or individuals to help out. So the re-entry function can be supportive and nurturing if it's on target, and not intrusive, not invasive, but available and appropriate.

Q: You talked earlier about the children's needs or young adults' needs. Perhaps you can expand on that a little bit more. I'm also interested in dividing what are some of the adult type of problems and what are some of the younger people's problems when they go overseas and when they return to the States.

SILBERSTEIN: Well, let's see. One thing that happens with young people is that they age more quickly. In other words, there is a big difference between fifteen and eighteen. Children often grow up overseas. They change a lot in the period of time that they're overseas, and a lot of formative experiences take place in an environment that they may never repeat. They bring that back with them in a very vivid form. I think one of the challenges is realizing that, integrating it, and encouraging the family to work with it positively. There is no prescription for this.

Q: Is there a particular difference between the very young ones and the teenage group? Do the teenagers ... Wherever they are, their problems are always going to be bigger than everybody else's. Is that your experience, too?

SILBERSTEIN: Yes. I think generally, individual differences aside, that's true. I think Foreign Service kids as a group have an amazing ability to adapt. It just came home stunningly to us, I think, when we created AWAL, but we've all seen it as the years have gone by. Sometimes you see extreme fallout, with severe depression, drug abuse, school dropouts, stealing. You never can determine if these things would have happened anyway or if it's part of the transition. There's a lot of pressure on a youngster who comes back and I think the need for support is enormous.

Q: Do you think younger children are just less capable of perhaps expressing their needs and their problems?

SILBERSTEIN: Well, I think language and articulation for younger children is developmentally an issue. Yes, I would have to say yes. But there are techniques that are very useful for younger children and work very well. There's an old tape that was made... Now it's old, it wasn't old when I came into the OBC when the ambassador was assassinated in Afghanistan, and it's still there. Elmore Rigamer, who is at State, was very facilitative with children in getting them to talk over an experience that was potentially devastating. Those kinds of things truly help.

A man name William Glasser has created a methodology and writes his books about how to facilitate circle groups with children where you raise an issue and grant them the safety to talk about issues in whatever terms they choose. The adult doesn't have a pre-set agenda. Those things can be very useful and it doesn't require a psychotherapist to do it. A facilitator or teacher should have some training in the technique and an understanding of the developmental stages of children. We probably could be doing much more in the foreign service to encourage those kinds of activities. I've just mentioned a couple of things out of a host of possibilities.

Q: I wonder if OBC can have some classes for the little ones? Do they? I don't think they do, do they?

SILBERSTEIN: At this time I don't think they do, but they continue to have families come with these interests.

Q: Yes. It's sort of like a microcosm of our society and it's intensified in the Foreign Service.

SILBERSTEIN: Yes, I think so. Because all transitions are tough on people or they arouse people to noticing things about themselves in their community. Foreign service transitions are very abrupt. You leave and you arrive.

Q: How about the perspective of the officers and the spouses when you were working with them at OBC, and also previously, of course, all your overseas experience? What was your observation? How did they relate to each other?

SILBERSTEIN: The officers and the...

Q: And the spouses. Of course not the married couples, necessarily, but how do foreign service officers look at spouses as a group in general, and then his or her spouse in particular? And the views of the Foreign Service perhaps?

SILBERSTEIN: Well I'm a little out of date where this is concerned. I really had my fingers on the pulse when I was at OBC.

Q: I'm thinking of at that time. Not now.

SILBERSTEIN: Well I think it varied a lot. I think there was a fair amount of acceptance of the voice of the spouse as a viable voice. A lot of that was certainly going on in the '70s when I was in Brazil. But there was also a certain patronizing attitude and spouses feeling they had to carry out the traditional role regardless of their interests.

Q: Let's back up and say at the various posts where you were. What was your observation of how the officers and the spouses relate to each other? Did they seem to have a pretty harmonious relationship? So that it's not like the officers are always the officers and the spouses are always the spouses and the statuses are very clearly divided at the posts where you were?

SILBERSTEIN: Well again, I'm not sure how to answer the question. I think there was an appreciation for what the spouse could bring, but that there was a fair amount of separation in terms of attitude.

Q: What kinds of things were you able to do when you were overseas? What kind of work were you able to find for yourself?

SILBERSTEIN: I was one of the lucky ones in that I always had something that I was doing either on a paid basis or on a voluntary basis that was very satisfying to me. In Pakistan, the International School -- it was really the American School -- asked me to set up an English as a Second Language program because I had been doing that for the Poverty Program before we went overseas. They gave me a little budget and we ordered materials and I trained a Pakistani woman in the method that they had taught me in the program. We moved the school toward becoming international. It was great fun. We increased the numbers of students because the English program was part of the curriculum. Children learn so quickly, we were just rapidly turning out English-speakers and having a wonderful time while we were doing it. So that was really my main work while I was in Pakistan. We ended up doing demonstration workshops for the Ministry of Education.

Q: Were those Pakistani children?

SILBERSTEIN: It was an international group. Most of the Pakistani children did speak English who were in the International School. Not all, but most did. And then in Brazil, I came fresh out of a master's program in special education, and it turned out that Brazil had just recently created the National Center for Special Education and they were very interested in what I knew, or what I was learning, because it was such an ongoing process. I actually worked with the Federal Government on strategic planning in special education. For part of that they were willing to pay me. They knew what my diplomatic status was, but they said that that was all right, they still wanted to do that.

I also did a lot of voluntary work with them. We met with people from all over that enormous country. We brought in a professor from the University of Minnesota and ran workshops on how to access resources and begin planning, so it was really quite interesting. I also ran a program in a small school that was run by an order of American nuns so English was the language in the classrooms, Portuguese was the lingua franca in the halls. And that's where -- I mentioned earlier -- I woke up to how profound the overseas international experience was for this host of youngsters from various places.

I also worked for the Fulbright Commission there. I did some work for the Bi-National Center in teacher training, and then I did some teacher training for another organization and taught educational psychology.

Q: That must have been interesting work.

SILBERSTEIN: It was wonderful. And one thing bounced off of another. It helped my Portuguese. I wasn't teaching in Portuguese, but I was doing the Fulbright work in Portuguese, and I enjoyed that.

Q: And previously in Asia, were you able to work at all?

SILBERSTEIN: Well in Cambodia I took the USIS course in teaching English as a second language and I was teaching Royal Khmer employees and also students that were preparing to work or to go to school in the U.S. I didn't work in Laos, but in Bangkok I did some voluntary teaching in Propa Dang, a Hmong village, with a friend.

Q: In those years, what was your observation of the level of satisfaction -- again I'm using this in a very general, broad sense -- of the spouses and families overseas at the various posts where you were?

SILBERSTEIN: The level of satisfaction almost didn't seem to enter into the picture in those years. Certainly it was an issue but not often voiced. It really wasn't until the '72 Directive that people discussed personal satisfaction routinely. But in those earlier years it was not an issue that I recall discussing very much.

Q: Interesting. Do you recall how you received that 1972 Directive? In other words, what was going through your mind when you found out about the 1972 Directive?

SILBERSTEIN: Well for me it was very educational. I found out about it before it happened. I was newly back from Pakistan and I was asked to come to a meeting at FSI to talk about it. It seemed so long in coming, I think my attitude was, why was this even necessary? But I also realized what the import of it was.

I felt it was something that probably should never have been necessary. If one had qualified as a foreign service officer, there should have been the option to continue working in the Foreign Service after marriage.

Q: So you were a little bit surprised by that? Did you know about that...

SILBERSTEIN: I don't think I was informed enough to be surprised!

Q: It was probably again one of those things that you never thought about because you hadn't known anybody in that situation, perhaps.

SILBERSTEIN: Exactly.

Q: That's interesting. I'm learning all these things through the interviews. It's interesting to see how different people view the various situations, and also how they dealt with the situation they found themselves in. Was there ever a moment when you doubted what you were doing in the Foreign Service?

SILBERSTEIN: In what way?

Q: Different ways. Were you ever surprised by what you encountered and felt in any way that this was not what you wanted, or that you were always pretty happy?

SILBERSTEIN: Well, there were places either because of the environment or because of terrorism where I felt either threatened or out of place. I don't mean that anybody made me feel out of place, but it just wasn't a good fit between me and the place we were living. From time to time that can be very, very difficult. I was fortunate because in most places I was doing work that I really cared about, so that helped.

I think friendship is another issue in all of this. For many women I think it probably is. I have been in places where I didn't have a good friend or good friends. And that was a loss or a kind of amputation and a longing. So if that was happening, and it did from time to time, it would certainly influence my sense of well-being.

Q: Is that something that someone can be prepared for?

SILBERSTEIN: Well, we used to talk about this quite explicitly in the ambassadorial spouse program because in a sense the ambassador's wife, if it's a woman as most are, is the person least likely to be able to find informal friendship. That doesn't mean that aren't a lot of cordial relationships, many of which can be very trusting relationships. But we used to talk about what a public figure is really all about. That's at one extreme. Certainly, I think it's something that goes into the whole work on transition. I concentrate some time on that in the work that I do now on so called "culture shock," or preparation for overseas living. We talk about relationships and what relationships we leave, and how those create a sense of emptiness and loss, and the fact that they're not necessarily carved out for you. They need to be sought when you're overseas. And they may not readily be there.

Q: What could one do in a situation like that when she -- I guess we're generally talking about spouses who were mostly wives. What could she do instead of just waiting it out to the end of the tour?

SILBERSTEIN: Well, it's a very individual matter. Sometimes you do find a confidante. And sometimes, certainly if you're not the ambassador's wife, the possibility for having friends in the community is probably increased. There are no pat answers to these things, but certainly what can be useful apropos of your question is a period of some exploration before you go out, so you first of all are aware of the issue. It becomes conscious. And then you can think about your own resources for dealing with it.

Q: How about some of the community type of support one gets overseas as part of the Foreign Service family?

SILBERSTEIN: What are you thinking of in terms of community support?

Q: I'm thinking of maybe a women's group. In your experience, what kinds of things were available to you that would pull an embassy together? Help families stay together, help them find things to do and so on? Just the various types of groups or meetings available in your experience?

SILBERSTEIN: Well, I was not actually posted overseas when the Family Liaison Office was created, so I didn't have the good luck to be in a community where there was a CLO. And I think that represents an enormous potential. The role is so vital to the well-being of families in a very concrete way. There are various things you must find when you go. You have to have a place to live, you have to have a child in school, you have to know what your health resources are and where to get the things that you need, so there's that.

And then in an ongoing bigger picture, there's orientation. And we did, when I was at the OBC, try to work with the orientation concept in various ways. That was what we were doing with administrative people when we were doing a training is to talk about, not just orientation as a useful vehicle for informing people, but its direct impact on an administrative person, a GSO, an administrative officer to perform because where people are better informed about what is going on, they're more likely to be cooperative. They may still give you problems, but at least there will be some comprehension of what's happening, so there was that. Then with the ambassadors to talk about post morale and what the issues were there, because we wanted them to perceive that as part of their role and, depending on the ambassador, some did and some didn't.

Q: It seems like again the point of bringing the officers into the picture comes out here with how the families are to deal with the various officers at the embassy to make their lives easier.

SILBERSTEIN: Yes.

Q: As well as the ambassador to perhaps help them understand the needs of the families.

SILBERSTEIN: Yes. I think where we really were able to have some impact was with the DCMs because they were for the most part career people. They had seen what community needs were, and often we had very productive training sessions with them with very lively interchanges about things that might be done.

Q: So without a CLO in those days, to whom did one turn? Were there women's groups, were there children's groups?

SILBERSTEIN: Yes. Almost always there was an American women's club or an international women's club, and some of them functioned very effectively, organized material well, did a lot of on-going programs so that people could become a part of that as they needed to. And then there was the school and sometimes there were...

Q: The PTA? The Parent Teacher Association, that sort of thing?

SILBERSTEIN: Yes, and offshoots of that in various ways. But I think often people created needed supports very informally on their own. They might appeal to another spouse in the employee's section of the embassy. Often there was somebody assigned to look after you when you came in, and that could be extremely helpful. There were a lot of

things that were not spelled out. For example, if you were a new spouse and you had never worked for the service before, there was a good chance you might make some mistakes in the beginning. How you hired domestic help, what your official responsibilities were, what the relationships in the mission were -- and so on.

Q: Were you ever in doubt of what you were supposed to be doing at any post in terms of this is what American policy is in this country, or do I know about how to represent the U.S. in this country. Things like that? Did you ever question?

SILBERSTEIN: I don't remember having that sense, though I may have. I just don't remember it. That side of life seemed to have a very organic quality. You would hold a function and have a party for a specific reason. You would do what you needed to do. You'd learn about it. It was not very organized, I guess, and yet we learned it, probably from each other more than anything else.

Q: I'm surprised to hear that it's actually not very organized. It seems like everything was pretty organized overseas.

SILBERSTEIN: Well I think a lot of things are. I never was able to attend training, but there were the two-week classes we discussed earlier. They covered protocol, responding to criticism overseas, foreign policy, and what the role of the spouse was and how the spouse would be perceived.

Q: But you never had a chance to take those classes yourself for your own use.

SILBERSTEIN: I actually took them several times, but always on re-entry. I never took them before I went out. I was always either working or not in Washington. I wasn't able to do it.

Q: And yet you were obviously working very hard on those programs when you were at OBC.

SILBERSTEIN: Yes.

Q: That's interesting. Without having taken those before you went overseas...

SILBERSTEIN: Well I did take them, but afterwards..

Q: Take them afterwards, yes. I keep thinking back about how hard you must have been working at OBC to pull all these things together considering how busy the office is now. As you look back now, what were some of the highlights and things that you can offer to the new people coming in?

SILBERSTEIN: Well, there were so many highlights. Learning a language and being able to speak that language, however badly, was a wonderful experience. Meeting certain

people overseas was a wonderful experience. Some of the small things that are open to you as possibilities for seeing the world are just astonishing. When you bring them back and kind of reflect on them. Sometimes they don't seem so astonishing, but sometimes they do when you're right in the middle of them.

Q: How does this affect your family, the rest of your family? Having you gone all these years and not always around for Christmas and birthdays and things like that?

SILBERSTEIN: Well it didn't seem to have an adverse effect on my family. I know it does on some. But we pretty much -- and I've reflected on this -- I don't know exactly what the reasons are -- picked up where we left off. I have a small family. My family's in Chicago, and I remember going back to my father's cousins who are really my close family there, and having this warmth to fit back into. They're kind of bewildered, dazzled, puzzled, but always interested. So I was lucky in that respect. Great questions and kind of the delight of just being back together again.

Of course we'd float through as visitors. It wasn't the same re-entry issue you have when you come back and fit in, where you actually have to live there. So we were really just wonderful visitors all together. I don't feel as though I really suffered in coming back together with family. And in my husband's family, we also have a very close relationship with his two sisters and their children, and we'd come back again with a sense of renewal and the delight of being together. I just think I'm extraordinarily lucky as far as that's concerned.

Q: You're very lucky, that's very true. How about their coming to visit you? Did that happen often?

SILBERSTEIN: Rarely. But it happened. My parents came to visit us in Brazil. We've had occasional other visitors. A close friend of my husband's visited us in Pakistan and two friends visited us in Brazil. Other people did come, but not too often.

Q: What were their reactions like when they see an American mission functioning overseas and someone they're very close to -- say your parents seeing their daughter in this context serving the government?

SILBERSTEIN: I don't know. They seemed to fit right into whatever it was we were doing and kind of enjoy what was there. It's curious. I'm not sure that they reflected on the American mission side of things. They enjoyed being with us, I think, in our home and taking part in the things that we were doing. We had a couple of parties and they enjoyed that. We did some traveling together and that was fun, but I don't remember their considering their trip in light of what a Foreign Service mission was doing.

Q: I'm just curious because I thought that often people who are not involved with the Foreign Service probably have different ideas about what the Foreign Service people do, and they certainly don't get so close to the embassy, let's say, or consulate, except for,

perhaps, going to get a new passport, or if they lost a passport, or something like that. I'm just wondering how an "ordinary" American person sees...

SILBERSTEIN: Well I can tell you one thing that your question reminds me of. A couple came to visit who were contemporaries of my parents and were like a second mother and father to me. I grew up with their children in Chicago and so we were very close. We took them to the Marine Ball in Rio. It was wonderful. We saw it through their eyes. They saw it as a very glittery, wonderful occasion and they had a great time. We had more fun because of them.

We came home after that. They were in their '70s, very lively and they loved to dance and do things. We changed clothes, and we went to a samba club. The club was a huge structure where the practice for Carnaval was going on. You heard marvelous pounding samba music, but utterly bewildering to visitors. It was like nothing they had ever heard or seen before. Several hundred people, overwhelming sound. We danced until 4 o'clock in the morning with these 70-year old people among many, many Brazilians.

We walked out with the group because at 4 o'clock they close the club, and the *bateria*, this pounding percussion group walks out and you walk out behind them. We looked up and there was the Corcovado, you know, the Cristo up on the mountain, the famous symbol of the city. And it was illuminated by the moon. And we just stood there, stopped to watch this incredible spectacle. But you can imagine what this evening had been like. First we had been at a very proper formal evening with the Marines cutting the cake with a sword.

Q: With a sword!

SILBERSTEIN: Yes. Now our friend who's in her eighties, reflects on it with me often. They probably saw our life there filtered. We don't do that kind of thing everyday! But it looked like life was pretty filled with that kind of activity.

Q: That's sort of what I was thinking of how they see it. They're there for so little...

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Manuel Silberstein

Spouse Entered Service: 1951

Left Service: 1985

You Entered Service: 1953

Left Service: 1985

Status: Spouse of Retiree

Posts:

(Manuel Silberstein before marriage)

1951-53 New Delhi, India
1954-55 Salzburg and Vienna, Austria
1955-56 Saigon, Vietnam
1957-59 Sao Paulo, Brazil
1959-64 Phnom Penh, Cambodia

(Fanchon & Manuel Silberstein)

1963-64 Phnom Perth, Cambodia
1964 Saigon, Vietnam
1964-65 Savannakhet, Laos
1965 Bangkok, Thailand
1965-67 Washington, DC
1967-70 Islamabad, Pakistan
1970-74 Washington, DC
1974-78 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
1978-79 Syracuse University, New York
1979-85 Washington, DC

Spouse's Position: Administration

Place/Date of birth: Chicago, Illinois, June 9, 1938

Maiden Name: Blender

Date/Place of Marriage: December 23, 1962, Chicago, Illinois

Profession: Cross-cultural Trainer

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:

A. At Post: Many teaching and counseling positions

B. In Washington, DC: Coordinator, Overseas Briefing Center; Consultant, Training and Design for government and private organizations; Board member, National Multicultural Institute; Curriculum Committee, Center for Mind-Body Studies

Honors (Scholastic, FS):

Department of State Superior Honor Award for FLO

End of interview