

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

MARY ANN STOESSEL

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is July 9, 2003. This is an interview with Mary Ann Stoessel. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. What do you go by, Mary Ann?

STOESSEL: Mary Ann.

Q: All right Mary Ann. Let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

STOESSEL: I was born, I am a rather rare bird in that I was born in Washington, DC, on December 22, and I am not giving you the year.

Q: All right.

STOESSEL: Unless you insist.

Q: I would really like to have it because I mean this is sort of an historical record.

STOESSEL: This will be our secret.

Q: It will be awhile before...

STOESSEL: 1921.

Q: Okay, it puts everything into context by knowing when you were born. You have got things like the depression and WWII and all that.

STOESSEL: Of course you can guess my age just by the fact of how long ago I served in the Foreign Service.

Q: Well now, can you tell me something about your family, first on your father's side. What was your maiden name?

STOESSEL: My maiden name was Ferrandou. It is a French name. Both my mother and father are from or were from New Orleans. My whole family were New Orleanians. Very proud.

Q: Okay, let's take your father's side. How did the Ferrandous get to New Orleans and what were they doing?

STOESSEL: Oh, Lord. Originally through, I don't know if it was Haiti or one of those islands where so many of the French sons, the second sons particularly were sent to start plantations or whatever. There was one, he made his way to New Orleans, and so that is where my father.

Q: What was your father, what was his line of, let's say your father's father. What was his line of business?

STOESSEL: Well, let's see. My paternal grandfather was an engineer, and he died while I was about seven or eight. It is hard to remember, but I know I have a beautiful silver bread tray engraved with his name upon his retirement as president of the New Orleans cotton exchange. He had something to do also with public transportation in New Orleans. That is about all I can say.

Q: What did your father do?

STOESSEL: My father when he retired he was one of the vice presidents of Chrysler. He was also an engineer. He started out with the Dodge brothers. It was he who designed the ram that is often on the Dodge products. Now it has been modified, but it used to be a ram. You are too young; you don't remember, but it used to be a ram. We lived in Detroit for eight years, and then came back to Washington. My father stayed with Chrysler, because Chrysler of course as you may know, took over Dodge. He stayed there until he retired.

Q: And your mother's family, where were they from?

STOESSEL: My mother was born in San Francisco. Her father came from New Orleans. He had gone to California, it had something to do with the gold rush I imagine. He met this beautiful Italian girl, whose father was a banker I think in San Francisco. They fell in love, and stayed in San Francisco for several years because both my mother and her older brother were born in San Francisco. So then I guess my maternal grandfather, either was missing his gumbo too much or whatever, he took his young bride back to New Orleans. Can you imagine what that must have been like going across the country. This must have been 1885 or before then on those hot trains and everything.

Q: Well, he wouldn't have gone on the train until in the 1860s because the train went after the Civil War.

STOESSEL: Say the approximate. She was born about 1892. They had trains then. So he gets her back to New Orleans somehow, for a little while, and then she died in childbirth. She is buried there. But here was this poor young girl coming from cool wonderful San Francisco into New Orleans. If you think it is hot here, you ought to be in New Orleans. So my maternal grandfather was Irish. There are quite a few Irish in New Orleans actually. He was Irish and then he married the Italian, so my mother was Irish and Italian. My father was French.

Q: Well now, one of the interesting things about the Irish in New Orleans is that they used to ship wheat and rice to Great Britain and all down the Mississippi. Many Irish immigrants got on these empty ships going back. I know because my grandmother was one of those I think, who came, or great grandmother anyway, came across.

STOESSEL: You mean when they came back after having delivered their load.

Q: Yes and they didn't have much to take back.

STOESSEL: So they took passengers back.

Q: They became pretty lousy passenger ships. I mean these were immigrants.

STOESSEL: They came to New Orleans.

Q: Came to New Orleans as an entrée into the United States. Well anyway, so 1921, when did you move?

STOESSEL: When I was four we moved to Detroit.

Q: And you lived there for...

STOESSEL: We lived there for eight years. I was put in a school called the Sacred Heart, ran by a group of Belgian nuns. They had schools all over the world.

Q: Well now was your family a Catholic family?

STOESSEL: Yes, however, my father left the church. He was a Christian Scientist.

Q: In Detroit, what do you remember sort of family life and all?

STOESSEL: Family life in Detroit? One thing I remember about Detroit is how cold it was. My mother used to make me go outside and play, and I would sneak in through the basement and hide down in the basement. She never did catch on. I remember they have the wonderful lakes there, and my father and a friend had a wonderful sailboat. I remember sailing with them. I remember the rum runners who used to come from Canada out to the ship bringing whiskey I assume.

Q: Did you watch the rum running boats? These are high powered motor boats.

STOESSEL: Yes, they must have been.

Q: How did you find the nuns? One hears about the strictness of the nuns there. Were these benevolent nuns or were these pretty strict nuns?

STOESSEL: Yes, very strict. You know we were in class we had to sit up straight. We were not allowed to cross our legs. We wore uniforms of course. Awful dark blue, navy blue with white collar and they itched. It was horrible, and brown lisle stockings. Oh, dear. And when we met one of the head nuns going down the hall, we had to curtsy. No, it was a very strict order. In fact after ten years, I couldn't take it anymore. I told my parents I am going to run away. I am not going back to that school. They sent me to Holton Arms which is a school in Washington.

Q: Well what about, did you find despite the rigid uniforms that you had to wear, did you find any subjects that particularly interested you?

STOESSEL: In school?

Q: Yes.

STOESSEL: Oh, I loved logic. And I loved, what were some of the other subjects I loved so much? I didn't like studying. I never went on to college.

Q: Did you belong to, I have heard stories about how the automobile people had their own sort of society, and lived apart from the rest of Detroit and all that. Was this a...

STOESSEL: Well you know, I was just so young, four when I went and eleven when I left. My parents had friends outside of the automobile world. Yes they did. But also many of their friends were naturally colleagues of my father.

Q: Then what brought you to Washington and after?

STOESSEL: Well, let me see this was the early 30's. They decided they needed a representative in Washington. So this was depression time I guess; 1931, was that depression?

Q: Oh, yes '31, the depression really started about 1929.

STOESSEL: Yes. I remember, we were living in Detroit at the time, and we were in New Orleans because we always went back every winter. I remember having to leave early because Roosevelt, "That man," as my father used to call him, closed the banks. So we came home. I do remember that.

Q: Well, Roosevelt came in in 1933. I think the banks were closed at that point.

STOESSEL: Well I was living in Washington. Maybe, I don't know. I thought we were in Detroit.

Q: Well, I take it you came from an extremely Republican family.

STOESSEL: I don't know about extremely, but definitely Republican.

Q: Republican who referred to Roosevelt as "That man in the White House."

STOESSEL: And the Washington Post as that communist rag. Of course it was very interesting in New Orleans because my, I don't know which side was which, but one was very pro Huey Long, one family, and the other was very anti Huey Long. So that was always interesting.

Q: Of course Louisiana politics don't have any reference to anyplace else in the country.

STOESSEL: Fortunately for the country.

Q: Well, you went to Holton Arms. How long did you go there?

STOESSEL: I was only there two years, my last two years.

Q: That took care of...

STOESSEL: Then high school.

Q: How did you find Holton Arms?

STOESSEL: Oh, living in Washington I had a lot of friends. I had more friends at Holton than I had at the convent. The convent was very small. My graduating class would have had three people. Well you see it was depression and most people couldn't afford to send their children to private schools.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

STOESSEL: Well, I was in this convent, the Sacred Heart, for ten years. Then I went to Holton Arms for two years.

Q: Okay, so that takes care of high school.

STOESSEL: Yes. And I stopped there.

Q: You know at Holton Arms again, what sort of things did you find interesting.

STOESSEL: Oh, I liked, we had a marvelous teacher named Miss Brown, who later became the head mistress. Everything she taught was marvelous. She taught physiography class that I liked very much. I always enjoyed my French lessons where ever I was. I didn't really like studying much.

Q: In your family was French ever spoken, I mean had you picked up quite a bit of French form New Orleans?

STOESSEL: Oh, yes. In my father's family they spoke almost exclusively French, until his grandmother died.

Q: How about outside of school. What sort of activities?

STOESSEL: Oh, tennis, swimming. You mean as a youngster?

Q: Yes.

STOESSEL: Tennis I picked up a little bit later in life. I always loved the water as kids do. I loved movies.

Q: This is a high period of movies. Hollywood was churning out...

STOESSEL: Oh, I know. We had those wonderful films and wonderful stars n those days. Whenever I can I try to see their movies. I prefer them to the movies being made today.

Q: I do too. I was watching a movie of Edward G. Robinson and Jimmy Cagney, the day of the Faces.

STOESSEL: Great stars.

Q: Well, how about reading?

STOESSEL: I never have been a reader. Now I enjoy reading. I always had to be doing something. I am still a little bit that way.

Q: Well you get out of Holton Arms, what are you 18 or so?

STOESSEL: Yes. I had my debut, my coming out party n Washington. I was graduated in June.

Q: This would be '39.

STOESSEL: I graduated in 1940, graduated in June and had my coming out party in

Washington in December and then in New Orleans in January. That year was pretty much party-party.

Q: How about the young lads that you were going with. Were they getting ready for the military or did they know their arrangement?

STOESSEL: Oh, sure they were, but not as many, mostly they were just getting ready to go to college. It was a lot of talk to think about war. We were the sort of typical elderly teenagers if you want to put it that way. Interested in a good time, and of course in those days the girls didn't all go off to college.

Q: Well, I mean had college crossed your radar? Had you thought about it?

STOESSEL: My father said you can go to any college you want, but you have got to study if you go. I said, "I don't want to go."

Q: So what did you want to do?

STOESSEL: Get married, and have a family. That is what girls our age did in those days. Then the war came and I joined the Red Cross as a volunteer.

Q: So what did you do, you were in the Red Cross from when to when?

STOESSEL: See you are taxing my memory. Let see, the war was 1941, Pearl Harbor. I think it must have been just shortly after that.

Q: '42 probably.

STOESSEL: Yes, probably. Yes. I first started as a grey lady, what they call a grey lady. They worked in the hospitals handing out magazines, writing letters for the guys, that sort of thing. Then I went on to become what they call a nurses' aide. We worked actually with the patients in the wards and that sort of thing doing pretty menial work in order to release the nurses for more substantive work.

Q: What hospital?

STOESSEL: I was a grey lady in the naval hospital out in Bethesda, and then when I became a nurses' aide, I worked at Georgetown and a little bit at emergency. But then the most exciting, most fun of all, they asked for volunteers to go to a general hospital in West Virginia. You talk about hardship, it was the Greenbrier Hotel that had been turned into a general hospital. It was pretty nice living really. They had darling little cottages, sort of like this but smaller. We stayed, we lived, the Red Cross volunteers lived in these cottages. But we worked hard. We were up at seven in the morning and worked until three in the afternoon on the wards, and thereby releasing the nurses. We emptied the bed pans, we took the temperature, all that sort of thing, the no brainer things. That freed up

the nurses to do more important things.

Q: Who were the patients?

STOESSEL: No we were not allowed to work with the officers. We only worked with the enlisted men. They were so great; I just loved them. They called me "Sunshine." Isn't that nice.

Q: How long did you do that?

STOESSEL: We did that for a whole summer. Then in the fall they asked us to go to another military hospital in West Virginia in Martinsburg, West Virginia. So we went there for a month or so. Then when we came back, then I started working in the civilian hospitals.

Q: Where?

STOESSEL: Civilian, Georgetown.

Q: Well how long were you doing this?

STOESSEL: I was doing it a long time because I met Walter in 1945, and I was still doing it then. I guess I did it until I married, which was in June of 1946.

Q: Now how did you meet your husband?

STOESSEL: Blind date. When I was living in Detroit, actually we lived in Grosse Pointe; it wasn't really Detroit. I had a best friend; her name was Betty. We moved to Washington. She and I kept up. Then the war comes along and I get a letter from her. In those days you just didn't pick up the telephone of course because it cost you \$100 a minute, saying that her husband was going to be coming to Washington and she was staying home to have their second child, and would I look after Howard. So Howard called when he got here. My parents and I used to have Howard over for dinner, and he would take me to the movies and we would do things like that. He kept telling me about this room mate. I said, "I am sorry. I don't go on blind dates." One Sunday he just brought him along. That was it. We went out to Chevy Chase Club and played tennis.

Q: That was Walter Stoessel. Did he have a middle initial?

STOESSEL: J for John, Walter John Stoessel Junior.

Q: What was his background?

STOESSEL: Oh, my goodness. He was born in Manhattan, Kansas. His father was in the army stationed there. Walter was born in 1920, so this was after the war. Born there, and

then they moved to St. Louis where they stayed for awhile, stayed in the army for awhile. Then they moved to New England to Springfield. He went in the insurance business, and he became a very successful general agent?

Q: Yes.

STOESSEL: Then he changed companies and they moved to California. By now Walter was about 16 and in his last year of high school. So they moved there; they lived in Beverly Hills. He went to Beverly Hills High School and graduated from there. Then he went on to Stanford.

Q: Did he get caught up in the military?

STOESSEL: When he graduated from Stanford he went into the navy.

Q: Where did he serve in the navy?

STOESSEL: First of all, when he graduated from Stanford, he went into the Foreign Service. He had taken his written exam and passed that, and as you know there was a bit of a hiatus between the oral and the written, so he went to work on the assembly line at Lockheed. It was only Lockheed then, it is Lockheed Martin now. So he worked on the assembly line. Then he passes his oral, goes into the Foreign Service, stationed in Caracas, Venezuela, and then comes back 40 years later on the board of Lockheed. Isn't that great. He knew the company from the very beginning working on the assembly line, and he ends up on the board of directors.

Q: Well during the war he left the Foreign Service and went into the navy.

STOESSEL: Yes, from Caracas, he went into the navy. And the navy sent him to Boulder, Colorado where there was a language school, and there he studied Russian. Then they sent him off to be a liaison officer in San Francisco. While he was in San Francisco the war ended. But he stayed in the navy. The navy sent him back to Washington. Then the State Department got him involved some kind of a job getting the former Foreign Service officers who joined the military back into Foreign Service.

Q: So when you met him, he was a Foreign Service officer.

STOESSEL: No, when I met him he was a naval officer, an ensign in the navy.

Q: Ah. So once you got married, where did you...

STOESSEL: Well we married in June of '46. He was out of the navy by then, back in the State Department. He was in Soviet affairs. Tommy Thompson was his boss. You probably have heard of him. Anyway, we were to go to Moscow. We were all set to go to Moscow, and it turns out Mary Ann is pregnant. No way was I going to have that baby

over there. So in August of '47, he went on ahead to Moscow. I stayed back, stayed in Washington where my parents still lived, and had the baby here. When she was three months old, she and I got on the old Gripsholm which had just been newly recommissioned as a passenger ship. It had been a hospital ship. It took us ten days to get to Sweden. But I am getting ahead of myself.

Q: That is all right. So eventually you ended up in Moscow.

STOESSEL: Yes. He was there from August until the baby and I joined him in April.

Q: So April, '48. You were in Moscow from when until when?

STOESSEL: It was a horrible time. I was there from April of '48 until about July, something like that, of '49. I hated every minute of it.

Q: Well, let's talk about Moscow in 1948 when you got there.

STOESSEL: It was the Stalin era.

Q: Oh, very much so.

STOESSEL: People really did disappear in the night. Our apartment was totally bugged. Mind you I was an only child, never been outside of the United States, and suddenly thrown into this very oppressive, scary atmosphere.

Q: How did it work with the baby and all that?

STOESSEL: Well in those days because the housing was so critical, in the embassy, well all over the Soviet Union for that matter, but in the embassy that if a wife went over there and took up the space of a clerk, we had to do that clerk or secretary's work. So while I was home in Washington waiting for the baby, I went to secretarial school so I could learn how to type. I never did learn very well, but anyway I did that. So I went to work in the embassy nine to five. We had, everybody had, a Soviet maid. We actually had two because of the baby, a mother-daughter team. So I would go out to the office, and the baby would be taken care of by these two marvelous women. The mother in particular, my baby grew up calling her "Mama." She considered her that, you know. I was somebody who came occasionally. Plus the fact that she heard her own daughter calling her mama. So anyway she called her mama. I will to this day never forget the day we left, and we had, her name was Anna. I will cry if I talk about it; some other time. But anyway, we tried to take her away from Anna, and she kept saying, "Mama, mama." She wanted to go back with Anna. She didn't want to come with me.

Q: How was work in the embassy in those days?

STOESSEL: What do you mean?

Q: What sort of things were you, who were you working for?

STOESSEL: Well I worked in the code room. I hated that. I worked, and I didn't like it so they took me out of there, and they put me in publications. I was just sort of a glorified newspaper carrier going around distributing Magazines and daily papers and things to the offices.

Q: The Berlin blockade started in '48. It must have made things quite tense there.

STOESSEL: Yes, quite scary because we were behind enemy lines really. It was interesting. We didn't think about it an awful lot. Yes, you know when you are young, you can handle most anything.

Q: Well could you get out and around at all?

STOESSEL: Somewhat, not much.

Q: How about just going to the theater or...

STOESSEL: Yes, you could, but tickets were hard to get. My Russian wasn't terribly good. We could only travel 40 kilometers outside of Moscow. There was no traveling, and there was a plane, I am not sure I am getting this right, there was a plane that left for Europe I think it was once a month, something like that. And also when we came in, the Soviets confiscated our passports. So even if we could find a way to get out we had no passport. It was a very unnerving time.

Q: Who was ambassador when you were there?

STOESSEL: Bedel Smith. Then just before we left, Alan Kirk, Admiral Kirk. Incidentally we had dinner with his son last night.

Q: How about with Bedel Smith. How did you find him?

STOESSEL: Well, he was joyous. Everybody knows about Bedel Smith. He was a you know very complex man. I didn't have anything at all to do with him. He had a charming lovely wife. We were pretty junior. One nice thing about Moscow in those days, there was no stratification in the hierarchy there. You go to a party and have secretaries, and ambassadors, it was like being on a little island. We were all there together. It was like being in the same boat. The secretaries in Paris used to write to their friends in Moscow and say, "Moscow sounds wonderful from what you say. Here nobody pays any attention to us. We are totally on our own." So there was this marvelous esprit, and the friends that we made in those days are friends still today, those that are left.

Q: Did you have any problems with the KGB or all?

STOESSEL: Well sure, they were all over the place. And I said the apartment was bugged. We were followed. The nurse, Anna, and her daughter were KGB.

Q: Were there any provocations or challenges or anything?

STOESSEL: Were we ever accused of anything you mean?

Q: Yes.

STOESSEL: No, I wouldn't be here now if we were. We were very careful, you know, very careful.

Q: What was your husband doing?

STOESSEL: Let me see. Then he was third secretary and consul in the consular section of the embassy. He went from there into the political section. You know for him it was terrible, one woman tried to cut her wrists right in front of him when he told her he couldn't get her out, couldn't give her a visa to leave the Soviet Union and enter the United States.

Q: Oh, boy. Under these circumstances could you meet Russians?

STOESSEL: No. We lived in a country and never had contact with the people. I mean I had contact with Anna and Klava. Those were the two maids in our apartment, and the gardener out at the dacha. This is one godsend for us. The embassy has what is called a dacha which is a summer house outside of Moscow on a little river. On weekends we used to go there, and that kind of saved our sanity.

Q: Well, after this enjoyable time, you left in July.

STOESSEL: '49, yes.

Q: Where did you go?

STOESSEL: Walter had been assigned to the Russian studies at Columbia, so we went to live in New York.

Q: So how was that?

STOESSEL: Oh, it was wonderful to get out of the Soviet Union. Another time you know to be home. A pity for my parents being an only child. That was lovely, and I was pregnant again with Susy. The baby I was originally talking about, she wasn't at the bench party because she was off in South Africa. What was your question, Stu? I forgot.

Q: I mean, it must have been a tremendous relief to be in New York, wasn't it?

STOESSEL: Oh, yes.

Q: How did you feel about your husband, I mean he is taking Russian studies. He is obviously going to be...

STOESSEL: And I swore I would never go back again.

Q: ...a Russian hand. You know it is pretty obvious that a certain commitment, he and both of you were making a commitment. You were having another baby; he is studying Russian. The future is pretty obvious.

STOESSEL: I obviously didn't mean it when I said I would never go back.

Q: After what, a year in Columbia.

STOESSEL: A scholastic year. We were there for nine months. Then we, he was sent off to Germany, and this was still occupation time, 1950. In 1950 we went to a wonderful little spa town near Frankfurt called Bad Nauheim. It was lovely. That was so nice, and a lot of the friends who had been with us in Moscow were there with us. We were given this lovely house and a servant and PX and movies. It was a lovely tour.

Q: How long were you there?

STOESSEL: We were a year in Bad Nauheim. Then we were sent over to Bad Hamburg which is equally nice, both of them outside of Frankfurt. We were there a year.

Q: So basically '50 to '52.

STOESSEL: '50 to '52, yes.

Q: What was Walter doing?

STOESSEL: What was he doing here?

Q: Was he a Kreis officer?

STOESSEL: No, he was still working on things Soviet. I don't know how much of that I am supposed to talk about.

Q: Life has gone on. Things have changed.

STOESSEL: Well interviewing émigrés and POWs and of course you know there was a terrible, I don't think he was involved in any of this, but you know many of those poor

Soviets who had either defected or were taken as POWs, we sent them back. Can you imagine.

Q: And they were all shot.

STOESSEL: They were contaminated.

Q: Also when I came into the Foreign Service, Owen Roberts was an enlisted man there who talked about having to put people you know, I mean almost by bayonet forcing these Russian prisoners onto trains which were sent back to the Soviet Union where they knew they were going to be killed.

STOESSEL: Walter was always interrogating these people. That much I know.

Q: By that point we weren't sending people back.

STOESSEL: I don't think so.

Q: No, I know we weren't. At that point the cold war had pretty well started, and after the Berlin Airlift and the coup in Czechoslovakia where the Soviets, the communists took over. We are talking about, and the Korean war, we are talking about a cold war situation. But he was talking then essentially to Soviet refugees. But after this time, where did you go?

STOESSEL: Then we came back to Washington to the Soviet desk. We were four years here.

Q: So that would be about '52 to '56.

STOESSEL: '52 to '56. Then in '55 Christine was born. She was the one who had the husband with malaria and the two little girls. We are talking about this bench party we had two weeks ago. So Christine was born.

Q: This would be your third.

STOESSEL: This was our third girl. Then we were assigned Hallelujah, to Paris. When she was nine months old, we went off to Paris.

Q: And you were in Paris from...

STOESSEL: We were there from '56 to '59.

Q: Where did you live in Paris?

STOESSEL: We lived in Neuilly. We lived in government housing in Neuilly for the first

two years, and the last year we were there we got a beautiful government house also in Neuilly. That was lovely.

Q: How did you find your French all there?

STOESSEL: You see we had it was a French convent really that I was in. I spent my whole life studying French. You know it is an entirely different thing. I could conjugate every irregular verb in any point of French grammar I could just rattle off like that. Then when I got to France, and tried to understand and to speak, it is a highly different thing. I was so disappointed. I was utterly crushed. But you know, when the brain is young.

Q: It came after.

STOESSEL: It came.

Q: Well, how was life in France at that time? You know there was very little French by British and American tourists and all were considered very standoffish. How did you find it?

STOESSEL: Well I think the French nature is to be a little bit of that. I don't think that changes with the times really. But this was De Gaulle time and the Algerian war was going on. We were there also this was the time of the Suez canal crisis.

Q: Yes that was October, '56 when both the Hungarian revolution and the Suez Canal crisis.

STOESSEL: And they had gasoline rationing. Some of the French would say, oh, you diplomats. You get all of the gas you need and everything. I would say, "You think what you want. We do get gas, but also we go in our black tie and long evening dress on the subway to a dinner party," which was true. We did not take advantage of it.

Q: What about were you able to have good French contacts?

STOESSEL: Well Walter had very good contacts in the foreign office Quai d'Orsay. We didn't have many really close French friends. The French, as I say they are a bit aloof. I find that even among the French in New Orleans. They are [aloof] unless they know who you are.

Q: Well, did you get any feeling towards, were things rather tense between the Americans and the French during the Suez crisis and all. Did you pick up on any of that?

STOESSEL: We were against it, so I think there must have been.

Q: We were essentially telling the French and British to lay off this attack on the Egyptians.

STOESSEL: Right, so I think there must have been tensions there, but I really just don't remember except this business with the gasoline. Then of course the tragedy was that it attracted attention away from Hungary. It might have been a different outcome there, although I doubt it.

Q: Yes, it is hard to say. Did the Hungarian crisis... Was there an influx of Hungarians into Paris and all?

STOESSEL: No. What I do remember though, I remember taking clothes being collected for them down to Gare d'Orsay, which is now of course a museum. I can remember bringing clothes down there to send to the Hungarians.

Q: Well, you left there in '59. Whither?

STOESSEL: To Harvard, again to study more Russian. Well, it wasn't so much Russian there, I have to take that back. This was, Henry Kissinger and Bob Bowie are in the Center for International Studies. That is where Walter got to know Henry Kissinger. We were neighbors. We lived in the same town, and he and Walter used to drive back and forth together.

Q: How did you find Henry Kissinger at that time?

Well, it sounds like you are getting pretty close to going back to Moscow, aren't you? So 1960.

STOESSEL: 1960 we were there. And then after Harvard, Walter was sent back to Washington as head of the secretariat working for Christian Herter, who was Secretary of State then. That must have been... It wasn't Dean Rusk yet.

Q: No, then it was Christian Herter.

STOESSEL: It was Herter. That's right, working for Herter. That is a grueling job, you know.

Q: You hardly ever saw your husband.

STOESSEL: I never saw hem. Then comes the election and Kennedy is president and brings in Dean Rusk. So Walter said, "I know you want to have your own person. I'll step aside." He said, "No, no, we want you to stay." But Kennedy didn't want a career Foreign Service officer. Anyway, they said, "Walter, maybe it is just better that you change. Where would you like to go?" They just felt so bad. He said, "These are the posts that are open." One of them was Paris, so we went back to Paris in 1961.

Q: How long were you in Paris?

STOESSEL: Well this time for two years. He went back this time he had the rank of counselor of embassy, but he was assigned to Lauris Norstad out at NATO. It wasn't NATO then, what was it. It was called something else wasn't it?

Q: Was it? It was always NATO.

STOESSEL: As political advisor. That was wonderful post. Being with Norstads was just marvelous. He was so brilliant. She was fantastically elegant.

Q: An air force general.

STOESSEL: Right.

Q: Very erudite wasn't he?

STOESSEL: Absolutely. In fact as Walter used to say, that man does not need a political advisor. He tells me what is going on. We became very close with the Norstads, and I still am with her.

Q: What were you picking up about the NATO, the French relationship at that point? Was it getting more difficult or not?

STOESSEL: I don't believe so. When did De Gaulle pull them?

Q: I think around '64-'65.

STOESSEL: Well, everything was all right while we were there.

Q: What sort of things were you doing?

STOESSEL: Well I was taking cooking lessons. Do you mean I, Mary Ann or Walter?

Q: You.

STOESSEL: Cooking lessons. Going to fashion shows, an entirely frivolous life, totally frivolous. I did go to the Sorbonne and did some work there at the Cours de la Civilisation Francaise. So I touched on a little bit of everything. I did that. I went to as many restaurants as possible. We had some nice summer holidays down on the Cote d'Azur. That was certainly one of our happiest times there in Paris.

Q: Well after that in '62, whither?

STOESSEL: Well we were there from '61 to '63. Then you guessed right. Where do we go, back to Moscow. So Walter went as DCM to Moscow in '63. Foy Kohler was the

ambassador.

Q: '63 to '65?

STOESSEL: Yes. We were there when Kennedy was shot.

Q: How did that go? It must have been a very nervous time wasn't it?

STOESSEL: In a way it was a rather poignant time because we had the book of course that people would come and sign. Gosh, who was the Soviet president? Was that Kosygin? Anyway so he came to Spaso House, which was unheard of, to sign the book. The Soviets would stop us in the street with tears in their eyes, crying, they were so sorry. So it was as close as we ever got to them, but it didn't last.

Q: Once there did you find, I mean this is considerably after your first time there. Did you find a change?

STOESSEL: Yes. Basically there was a change. I am trying to think now who was the, was it Brezhnev who was there when I left?

Q: Well, I mean, Khrushchev...

STOESSEL: It was Khrushchev. Khrushchev was chairman. Things were better. You didn't have the people disappearing in the night, that sort of thing. But still there were bugs in all of our apartments. The servants were reporting to the KGB. We were followed. We still really couldn't travel. You could do more traveling than the first time, but basically the suspicion was still there.

Q: Was there any concern about radiation of...

STOESSEL: That came later.

Q: Could you develop any acquaintances among the Soviets? How about in the art world or something?

STOESSEL: It was much easier for the cultural attaches and the press attaché. They had certain contacts that were allowed to come to their apartments to parties and that sort of thing. Then we also had some exchanges at that time. Large groups would come, and the ambassador would have a reception. Then a few of what we used to call trained seals among the Soviets, they would come to the party.

Q: How did you find Foy Kohler?

STOESSEL: Oh, they had been there with us in the 40's, so we had known them a long time. We got along fine. They had no children. Our oldest daughter Kathy, Phyllis kind of

took her under her wing. Foy was very smart, spoke excellent Russian, as did she, and he had a genuine concern for his staff.

Q: How old are your children by this time?

STOESSEL: Let's see, this is the second tour there in '61. Well, Katherine, the oldest, was born in '48. That would make her 21.

Q: So she was away at school.

STOESSEL: We had to send them away to school of course. And then Suzanne, sent her off to Marymount in Rome. Katherine went to school in Switzerland. Then the little one, we were able to keep the little one, Christine, with us during that time. I think the last year we were there, I think we had sent Christine away.

Q: Well, were you feeling the same pressures, or was it better for you?

STOESSEL: It was somewhat better. Of course it is much better when you are the DCM. We had a lovely apartment, and car and driver and such. Not that I went anywhere. I spent most of that time studying Russian.

Q: Was your life pretty well centered with people from other embassies and all social life?

STOESSEL: It was incestuous.

Q: This can happen. During the time you were there, I was in Belgrade.

STOESSEL: Then you know. But I don't think any place, of course we were also in Warsaw and Warsaw was like Paris compared to Moscow. Moscow was the worst.

Q: You could travel around in Yugoslavia, but you know, still there was a problem.

STOESSEL: Well you feel very restricted. You know they are watching you every minute. Not that we were doing anything we weren't supposed to be doing, but it is just not the way we were accustomed to living.

Q: Then after that, we are talking about '65 or so.

STOESSEL: Then we came home.

Q: Then what?

STOESSEL: Let me see. In '65 what happened then. Walter came back in '65 as deputy assistant secretary for Europe, working for a man named John Leddy. So Walter was his

deputy. We were there for, we came back in '65, until '68. In '68 Walter was named ambassador to Poland. We left in September of '68. We had been staying at a friend's house in Georgetown. We were to leave on a certain day and take the train to New York and spend a couple of days there, and then catch the United States ship to Europe. We came out of this friend's house where we were staying to get in the state department car to take us to the train. There are headlines in the paper, Soviets invade Czechoslovakia. I guess that must have been August.

Q: It was in the early fall of '68. I think August of '68.

STOESSEL: Well then of course, Walter thought my gosh, how can I be going over there when they are doing all these bad things. Actually we had gone up to New York. He gets in touch with the State Department and asks what do you want me to do? This was so hard for us because here we are finally an ambassador and everything, and looking forward to our first post. We felt gee, the whole thing might fall apart. They said, "Well just sit tight. We will let you know what to do, whether to go or not to go." So we sweated it out for a couple of days. They said, "Do go, but go to Paris and spend," I think we spent a week or ten days. "Spend some time there and we will see what is going to develop." So we went to Paris. That is one time we didn't want to be spending ten days there. So finally they said "Go!" So we went on into Poland, and this was in the early fall of 1968.

Q: You were in Warsaw from '68 until when?

STOESSEL: '72. The first two years were great, particularly compared to Moscow. The third year was all right, but the fourth year, it is too long to be behind the iron curtain. The air was so awful. They burn that soft coal, and it gets in your lungs and in your nose.

Q: I sometimes think I am still spitting that stuff out from Belgrade.

STOESSEL: Yes because you had in Belgrade exactly what I am talking about.

Q: Well now, how would you describe when you arrived it must not have been a very happy time was it? I mean the Poles had taken part in the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

STOESSEL: Exactly. I had never been to Poland. I didn't know any Poles. I had nothing to compare it with. The Poles are a very friendly very warm people. I mean for Walter work wise and everything it was probably difficult, but there we had Polish friends. It was totally different from the Soviets.

Q: Did you find a difference between how you lived in Poland and you did in Moscow?

STOESSEL: Oh, day and night. As I say, in Poland we had Polish friends. They came to our house; we went to their house, Up to a point. After a while they would say no, we have been told we have got to cool it. Don't stop inviting us; don't forget us, and after a

little bit of time, they were allowed to come back. Nobody came of course, without permission from the KGB. But then we would go to their houses. It was just, the whole atmosphere was terrific. We could travel. The only problem there was the language. Oh, what a language.

Q: Your Russian didn't help.

STOESSEL: Oh, it hindered. So much like what you were speaking. It was so close. For example, [the Russian for "Goodbye"] was absolutely getting in the way of the Polish [for "Goodbye"]. We had to put our Russian out of our lives and concentrate on Polish.

Q: Did you find, did you have pretty good access to the artistic life there?

STOESSEL: Yes.

Q: How did you find that?

STOESSEL: I particularly, did you ever hear of the Mesoyser Singers, they are folk singers?

Q: They are the ones with the very deep voices?

STOESSEL: No, I think that is more Russian. But they did folk dancing and singing, so we had a lot of contact with them. This was the minister for culture we used to see. That was funny though because we, The minister of culture say would invite us to a luncheon at a palace outside of Warsaw. This is an old aristocratic palace, you know. There they had the silver with the crest and the napkins. It was funny, the napkins had holes in them. Beautiful linen, great big napkins, dinner napkins, but they all had holes in them. These were all things that were confiscated from the nobility. The communists in the government were using all these things.

Q: How did you find, did you take a lot of trips around with Walter, official trips?

STOESSEL: Yes, we did. We covered pretty much of Poland.

Q: You must have been deluged by congress people who were coming, because the Polish vote is very important in a lot of places, particularly Chicago, I mean Chicago is the second largest Polish city in the world after Warsaw. Did you find yourself doing an awful lot of entertaining for congress people?

STOESSEL: Yes, which is fine. I didn't mind that. I mean the junior wives, not just junior, many wives would not just do that. But I loved doing it, and I met so many interesting people that way. Also I involved the junior wives in it because it was good experience for them to meet those people and talk to them and make it interesting for them. No, I loved having the delegations.

Q: Did, were there any problems while you were in Poland?

STOESSEL: You mean politically or otherwise?

Q: Politically or on the social sphere or anything else.

STOESSEL: Politically, yes, but not a problem. In the early '70s there was a change of communist leadership when Giereck took over from Gomulka. And, of course, of great interest was the assumption of bilateral talks between China and the U.S. with my husband representing the U.S. These talks led to the secret Kissinger visit to China where diplomatic relations were again reestablished.

Q: Who was the DCM?

STOESSEL: When we first arrived it was Walter Jenkins, who since left us unfortunately.

Q: Yes, I have interviewed Walter.

STOESSEL: You have. And then came Gene Boster who later ended up as ambassador in Bangladesh and Guatemala. He and his wife Mary had been in Moscow with us in the 40's, and Walter had asked for him to come and be DCM.

Q: How about Polish-Americans? Did they, were you seeing a lot of Polish-Americans, people coming over on visits?

STOESSEL: Not too much, not really.

Q: I would assume that at receptions and all, the Poles you meet would all have a cousin or somebody in...

STOESSEL: Oh, yes. And it presented a problem too with trying to study Polish. Most of the Poles in our milieu spoke either English or Russian or German. Of course the Poles were occupied for a hundred years threatened by the Austro Hungarians, and the French. So I didn't really have that much chance to use my Polish except with the staff in the house. That was very interesting because when we first came, and we had a large staff in the house, I didn't know a word of Polish, and I didn't want to insult them by speaking German, and I knew they all had studied Russian in school, so I tried speaking Russian with them. They did not want to speak Russian. I thought My I had better try German. They were perfectly willing to speak German, but would not speak Russian. They just hated the Russians. Well, rightly so.

Q: Well then in '72 whither?

STOESSEL: In '72, well what happened in '72. I have got to go back. In '72, we came back to the department and Walter was assistant secretary for Europe.

Q: How long did he do that?

STOESSEL: Not very long. Not even a year and a half, because in '74 Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon insisted that Walter go back to Moscow as ambassador. We had been away so much, and we just got back to our house and I was so happy there. I did not want to leave, and Walter knew that. He told them, he would be happy to go in another year, but I don't want to go now. But they put pressure on him, and people said listen, you want to be ambassador to the Soviet Union you had better take it now while you can, which does make sense. So off we went. That was in early '74.

Q: How long was he there?

STOESSEL: We left at the end of '76.

Q: How did you find going back as the wife of the ambassador?

STOESSEL: Oh, that was cool. It was wonderful for me to go back and be the châtelaine of Spaso House. You know I had always been there serving at the whim of the ambassador's wife. No that was very good. I loved Spaso house, such a wonderful place.

Q: Well, this brings up a question. During the period that you were with Walter in the Foreign Service, the role of the wife had stayed about the same, hadn't it?

STOESSEL: It did. It began to change when we, while we were in Moscow. Some of the wives were not happy to come and help at the receptions and things. I don't mean they had to pass cookies or things like that, but they were supposed to, you know, entertain, talk to the guests. Which makes a much more interesting life for them. It was so short sighted on the part of some.

Q: Yes. The pressures on the ambassador's wife hadn't really changed, had they?

STOESSEL: No. Certainly not for me and those of my vintage. Now maybe younger ambassador's wives, maybe they would, but I doubt it. No it is not like it is now.

Q: The staff of Spaso House is pretty good wasn't it?

STOESSEL: Oh, we had quite a few outsiders. We had a huge staff, because the Soviets only worked eight hours, so we had to put them in shifts. The Maitre d'hotel was Italian. His name was Clementi. Clementi was a real character. So was his wife Maria who was my maid. Then there was this Chinese man named Tang. Tang had been there with Bedel Smith, so he was getting pretty old. Then we had an Italian cook. I brought in an Italian cook. Then we brought in the assistant chef. He was also Italian. So we had quite a few. I

know we brought in another Italian to be an understudy to the Maitre d'hotel. So we tried to have as few Soviets employed as possible, but there still were a lot. We must have had with all the different shifts and everything, we must have had close to 20.

Q: During this period, this is sort of the period of detente, wasn't it?

STOESSEL: The beginning, the hope for detente. But then of course, we passed, what was that bill?

Q: The Vanick Bill, Jackson Vanick. The Vanick amendment dealt with Jewish migration.

STOESSEL: That was the bill that put a damper totally on detente. I mean it just went down hill.

Q: Were you seeing any of the fruits of our exchange programs, I mean people coming back who had been in the United States, Soviets and all? Was there much understanding of the United States at this point or not?

STOESSEL: I think they all envied the United States and wanted to live there and have all the things we have. Of course they were never allowed to say that, express any such opinion. I never had any Soviet say to me I just loved my time there. I wish I could live there or something like that.

Q: Did you still feel the hand of the KGB?

STOESSEL: You could not live in that country and not feel it. We still had microphones everywhere. They even found a microphone you know in back of the great seal. That took nerve, didn't it?

Q: Well what about, did you get involved in the I am not sure what they are called at that time, the refusniks or the...

STOESSEL: No. Walter did not feel comfortable inviting them to Spaso. I mean after all we were guests of the Soviet government. I think he just felt that on the ambassadorial level it is a different thing from the political section and those people, I mean they could see them. We didn't, no.

Q: What about the again the artistic community? Again is this something that is pretty well open to you?

STOESSEL: Yes, and things got better that way. We had a lot of USIA. We had a lot of exhibits. We would open up Spaso house for them to have exhibits, and of course always big receptions for them. Things had gotten a little better culturally.

Q: Did you have any presidential visits while you were there?

STOESSEL: Yes, we had Nixon. Also Ford, who went straight to Vladivostok and was not in Moscow

Q: How did that go?

STOESSEL: This was just shortly before his resignation. This was in June. When did he resign?

Q: He resigned in '75.

STOESSEL: This was June of '75 and he resigned in August. He was there, and Mrs. Nixon. We traveled with them together down to Yalta. A really amazing performance on both of their parts. I was not that much with him, but I was with her. You would never know that there was anything wrong. You can imagine what must have been going through their heads. Then Ford came. That meeting took place out in Vladivostok, so he really wasn't in Moscow.

Q: Did you get involved with that at all?

STOESSEL: I got involved with Mrs. Ford, yes. Now let's see where was that? Then there was a meeting in Helsinki of many of the heads of state. That is where I got involved with the Fords.

Q: How did you find them?

STOESSEL: I didn't really have much contact with him, but from everything I have ever seen of him he was a delightful man. She was very nice, but of course she was having her problems at the time. We didn't know that.

Q: This was breast cancer.

STOESSEL: Breast cancer and recovering from pain killers addiction.

Q: Pain killer dependency and that sort of thing. It was a difficult time. She later established a clinic to help people, very renowned, to help people with that.

STOESSEL: That is right, the Betty Ford clinic in California. She was a brave woman.

Q: Well then, did you ever meet Brezhnev?

STOESSEL: Just to say how do you do. Walter used to meet with him, and it was great because they could speak in Russian. That is the advantage, you know, of having a career ambassador there who speaks the language. As you well know, in any kind of important meeting you have to work with your translators. You have to speak in your own language.

Q: Well, in '76, what happened? Did you leave?

STOESSEL: Oh, then we went to Bonn. We were in Bonn, this was before they moved to Berlin of course. We were in Bonn from '76 until January of '81. We were there a long time.

Q: How did you find that?

STOESSEL: Oh, for me Bonn was very boring. It is just a little village. For Walter it was fascinating because it was a very interesting time in our relations with the Germans. Schmidt was chancellor. He and Walter got along very well. The chancellor was always telling Walter what American policy should be.

Q: Helmut Schmidt and Jimmy Carter didn't get along at all. This is one of the more strained relationships.

STOESSEL: Yes.

Q: Did you talk to Helmut Schmidt at all?

STOESSEL: No. He didn't have time to talk to me.

Q: Yes, he was very much on.

STOESSEL: And also the Germans made us visit Jimmy Carter right away. Oh, he had to be Helmut, and Carter had to be Jimmy, that sort of thing. You know the Germans might sort of work their way into that sort of relationship. Then Carter came, well the president and Mrs. Carter and Amy came to Bonn while we were there. That was very interesting.

Q: How did that work out?

STOESSEL: It worked out fine. We moved out of our house, and the Carters moved in, which was fine. It is his house; he is the president. We traveled with them. I felt sorry for the little girl. She must have been about 10 at the time, something like that. It couldn't have been very interesting for her. You ask about Bonn, I mean Bonn, I spent two hours a day studying German. That was something. I really loved the German language. It is very nice. I would do that. I would walk along the Rhine. It is perfectly beautiful. Ever been to Bonn? It is along the Rhine; ships would go. So I studied German and walked is what I did except on weekends, played tennis, gave speeches to German women's groups (partly in German), organized entertaining both official and otherwise.

Q: Studied German and walked.

STOESSEL: On weekends we would go to Berlin, and then life began. That was just

wonderful. We had a lovely old house in Berlin because of the quadripartite partition of Berlin, the American ambassador had a staff in Berlin. Along with that came a lovely little house full of antiques and a staff, cook and maid. There we really had contact with the German people, the Berliners. It was so nice to be someplace where you were wanted. We would make a point of getting in the car, we always flew the flag, and going over into East Germany to show them you know, the Americans are here too. It is not just these Russians who are here, we are here too. We would go into bars, in West Berlin we would go into restaurants and bars, and people would come up to us and ask, ‘Now you are going to stay. You are not going to pull out. You are going to stay with us aren’t you.’ They were terrified that if we did leave, pull out, the Soviets would take over. So it was so nice to really be wanted.

Q: Now you were there during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. That must have been December of '79. Did that...

STOESSEL: Yes we were. Let’s see, I am trying to think. I don’t think it touched, It certainly didn’t touch my life. I don’t remember it too clearly.

Q: What was Bonn society like?

STOESSEL: Provincial. Well that is not fair. It was mostly government, like Washington, but it was much smaller. But it was mostly government people.

Q: So it was a little bit again, too much government and not enough, there really isn’t much cultural life.

STOESSEL: There was a university there. Cologne was the nearest culture that we had. We used to go over there for concerts and things. We did a lot of traveling. We tried and did visit all of the consulates of which we had many. So we visited with them. We had nice holidays. Germany is a lovely beautiful country.

Q: She is from there.

STOESSEL: That is right, you told me that.

Q: Did you find that as the wife of the ambassador there was a different role than say in Moscow?

STOESSEL: NO. Except there was more for me to do. I could do more things, except there wasn’t anything to do in Bonn. It was different. It was more fun in a way in Moscow, because we would have a big delegations that would come and interesting people, and then parts of the cultural exchange, a lot of that. I enjoyed that. Bonn, what would happen in Bonn is the principal would come but the wife would say no way, I will meet you in Paris or Rome. You go on to Bonn. So there were these so-called Hellenabends, or stag parties. You know I would be upstairs having my grilled chicken or

something while they are downstairs having their party.

Q: Well, in '81, what happened?

STOESSEL: '81, we thought we would be retiring from Bonn, and then Reagan asked Walter, No it wasn't Reagan it was Al Haig. Al Haig had been appointed Secretary of State, and he asked Walter to come back in the number three position in the department as undersecretary for political affairs. You talk about a killer job, that is also one. You just don't see much of your husband. He didn't really want to do it, but when the secretary of State asks you, he said, "Ok, Al, I will do it," because they had known each other when He was in Germany and Al was in Brussels. He said I will do it but I will only do it for two years. That was the deal. Well then as you know, what happened.

Q: Well, Haig resigned.

STOESSEL: Yes, but before Haig resigned Bill Clark, there was a big shuffle up at the White House and Regan left treasury and went to the White House and Baker then went over to treasury. Bill Clark who was deputy secretary of state went over to the White House. That moved Walter up to the number two position, deputy secretary of state. He was in that position until Al resigned. Walter knew George Shultz, he had worked for him. He went to George and said, "I know what you want to have your own man in here. I am only staying on a few more months because my tour is going to be up." So that was the end of his Foreign Service career.

Q: Looking back on this, what did you enjoy the most?

STOESSEL: In which field?

Q: Just in general.

STOESSEL: Just in general about the Foreign Service? Well, one thing I really just loved about being in the Foreign Service is that you felt that you were a team, and you are working together. That I really liked. Also, it was gratifying to know that I was serving my country.

Q: Well, great. I think this is probably a good place to stop. It is just the right time, too.

STOESSEL: We have been talking for two hours?

Q: Yes.

End of interview