

Foreign Service Spouse Series

STUART MARSHALL BLOCH

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi

Interview date: July 6, 1992

Q: This is Jewell Fenzi on July 6, 1992. I am interviewing Stuart Bloch at his office in Washington. Mr. Bloch is the spouse of Julia Chang Bloch, Ambassador to Nepal. I really have come to talk with him today about spouse issues.

You said a very important thing which displays your wife's sensitivity: that she would worry about you in Katmandu -

BLOCH: That's right.

Q: - because what would you do there?

BLOCH: That's right. The Ambassador would be concerned about my not being kept in a substantive way occupied and busy and engaged. I do things over there now - while I'm not there. We have started a Katmandu Valley Preservation League, where we do preservation on what we call "the pear preservation." They're not huge projects, but a small project, for instance, where there's a monument and there's a problem with the roof. We fix the roof. Or there's a monument and it needs to be protected in some way. We've worked on maybe a dozen monuments so far. I helped start that. I mean, I do things for Nepal, and for the Ambassador, here which I couldn't do over there, and she would worry more about me being there.

I might be more inclined to want to go over there and be in residence in the country... We're citing her concern at my being a male spouse, somebody actively engaged in his law practice and in investment holdings. It would probably be very difficult for me to disengage from those things that I'm doing so actively. I think that we've reached a balance between my own activities here and my visits to Katmandu and the work that I do there, and the things that I try to do while I'm here.

Q: I imagine it's just an extension of all the philanthropic work that you do do.

BLOCH: In some ways yes. The Ambassador is interested in the women's cooperatives there and I've been helping on this side trying to get them in touch with cooperative retail operations here in the States, in a textile market cooperative. So I try to do whatever I can here to support whatever she's doing over there. We've done it in the preservation area, we've done it in the co-op area; also helping people that want to get scholarships.

Q: I think it's interesting that you have done in Nepal, long-distance, the same type of thing that you do right here with your work, for instance, at the Support Center. I would love to know more about the Support Center.

BLOCH: That's one of our "babies." We were fortunate to be with the man who made it happen, John Cook - call him the Mother Teresa of philanthropic management - and it happened that we were all young and struggling and idealistic. His idea popped up actually over dinner conversation, then John Cook ran with it and I helped him along the way whenever there were bumps in the road that I could smooth out for him. Now it's thriving, and we celebrated the 15th anniversary of the Support Center, and he's kind enough to say that we're among the proud parents of that concept. There are about 15 jurisdictions now and they've helped literally thousands of non-profits manage their affairs better.

Q: They actually take over management of the non-profits?

BLOCH: No. They teach them how to do bookkeeping, how to do their legal and regulatory affairs. You know, you just gave me an incredible idea sitting here talking to you -

Q: Good!

BLOCH: I think John should start a health plan. I assume that insurance premiums for employees of non-profits are very high, because they're small. I wonder whether he couldn't start a nationwide health plan for non-profits, through the Support Center, because they're dealing with thousands of employees.[Sotto voce] I don't know why I thought of it!

Q: [laughing] Well, I'm glad you did. A small group of us are working in a non-profit group. Two of the women are divorced. They do have health coverage through the Foreign Service but when their income has been more than halved, such a plan might be - I was just wishing I had known about the Support Center when I set up our program, because I did it by trial and error. I think I'm "there" now but -

BLOCH: They charge only what you can afford to pay. Some people are charged nothing, some are charged a fraction of what you would pay elsewhere but they try to get some fee incoming, you see. They have to support themselves, of course.

We did something else in Nepal. We started the first Harvard Club. There are actually quite a few Nepalese that have attended Harvard and actually went back to Nepal. So we started a Harvard Club there. We also have a golf tournament every year, the Ambassador's Cup tournament. It was actually started by our predecessor, Milton Frank, but we continue it because it's quite an athletic and social event. Every year it seems to get bigger, and that's sort of my thing, my bailiwick.

Q: I'm very interested in your use of the term "we," because in my generation it was always "we." With our husbands we were a team, and it was the '72 directive that took away the credit support that changed the - it didn't physically change the relationship of the spouse to the Service but it changed her attitude, because she no longer had a role.

One of the things we're doing now, and perhaps you could give me some insight on this too, we feel - I'm part of a committee, I don't do the main work - that the Foreign Service spouse should be paid. Because the State Department recognizes you with a diplomatic passport, with training, with a lot of things - with the Family Liaison Office -

BLOCH: In my mind, there isn't any question about that. I wouldn't expect myself to get paid because I'm not living over there, although I do get \$200 or something a month for maintaining a separate household, which is more symbolic than anything. But I really think that spouses should get paid. I mean, basically the Ambassador[his wife] always says "what I need is a wife" and what she has instead of a wife is a manager of a house, the house manager. And he gets paid and he serves a lot of the functions that a spouse would serve in a situation like my Ambassador.

I think that, sure, there are things that spouses would do in the ordinary course of their life being married to an Ambassador or married to a husband who happens to be an Ambassador. But there are many other things that they would not ordinarily do over and above the ordinary responsibilities of being a spouse which - well, all those entertaining...

Q: The Fourth of July -

BLOCH: Oh God, she's just stood in line for six or eight hours on the Fourth. All of that entertaining, and all the management of the household, and all of the extraordinary volunteer type of activities with the local schools, like if there's a private school. I'm sure that the spouse has a lot to do with maybe the commissary, for example, or the club if there's an American Club there.

Oh I think there are many different areas - yes, I really think they should be paid without question. And I think that it's archaic and infantile for the State Department not to recognize the contribution of spouses. In every other aspect of life they are recognized. You know, two-income families is apparently the way of the world in the United States. I just saw statistics this week: 58% for families, versus 18% in Japan. So people go to work, spouses go to work, that's not bad, but they get paid for going to work. It's something that I hope will be addressed by the State Department.

Q: Unfortunately one of my colleagues, who had some legal experience, died two years ago. She always felt that spouse compensation would never arrive at State without legal action. I think I'm right about this: Say your Ambassador had a predecessor whose wife was at post and there was no resident manager. If you came to post with her, your Ambassador would not be entitled to that resident manager position; but you as a spouse would not be entitled to the resident manager's salary. So, now when your Ambassador leaves post, which she will do eventually, her successor should keep that position on the books.

Now say the Ambassador's successor brings a traditional spouse with him: she can keep that resident manager/ housekeeper on the books but if the spouse wants to [dismiss the manager and] run the residence herself, [she is not entitled to the salary].

BLOCH: But if the resident manager were not in place?

Q: She couldn't hire.

BLOCH: Oh. Well, actually that resident manager came in with the prior Ambassador, who was a bachelor.

Q: Exactly. And your Ambassador would qualify for the position.

BLOCH: Ambassador Frank qualified to get that position. But I'm sure, for example, that when Leon Weil was Ambassador, I met his wife and she was wonderful, and a very competent and professional woman, I'm sure that she worked as hard as he did.

Q: Of course she did.

BLOCH: Except he carried the title! And he felt that way too: they had a real partnership relationship. And they had children too. So I'm sure that her contribution was quite great.

Q: I'm sure it was.

BLOCH: Are there any other comparables? I guess this whole business about compensating spouses, you know - the Ambassador and the spouse, you're on call full time. When I was over there in April 1990, when they had the democratization movement, I was very much engaged in helping communication with Americans that were there, in going with the Ambassador to visit the Americans who were trapped in hotels, just in trying to help maintain communication and calmness during this very difficult period. So as far as I'm concerned [he laughs], I was as important as the Marines.

Q: I think you were!

BLOCH: But I personally don't ask for compensation because I think of it as service, but I'm in a different economic situation than people that have dedicated their life to the Service. And I will say that the people that have dedicated their life to the Service are extraordinary as a group, and not just at the ambassadorial level: I think the whole Foreign Service is amazing. I've been terribly impressed by the people, the AID people, the USIA people, and the Embassy people. I think the toughest people to deal with in the Foreign Service are the support people, like secretaries; but they're the toughest people to deal with in the private sector, to tell the truth. They have the worst attendance records of anybody in my operation. You figure it out - the hardest to hire, the hardest to satisfy.

Q: Because as a rule they're not doing anything creative. They're carrying out somebody else's... [drumming fingers on table like typing]

BLOCH: Could be. But people should like their work and be proud of it whatever it is, whether you're a janitor or whether you're president of a company. You ought to take pride in your work and enjoy it and if you don't, go do something else. That's why it's a free country.

Q: I think the State Department has trouble with that too.

BLOCH: Yes. With their support people they do, they do. But my impression of the level of service, at least the people that have worked with my Ambassador, is that some of them are phenomenal in their intellectual abilities and their energy levels; in every way. Now, I'm probably lucky, because I think that Julia finds the best in people, gets the best out of people. That's one of the things she does as a profession, so I'm always lucky to see the people that work for her, and I find many of them to be remarkable and many of them have gone on to have careers independent of her.

Q: I'm sure she's discussed the people in the mission with you. Has she discussed anything about the role of the women, the wives, who are there in Nepal?

BLOCH: Oh the wives are important. I think the Ambassador really feels that the wives are terribly important, they play a role. As far as I know, they run the school system, Lincoln School there. And they have a lot of charities that they support. Oh they're active. And you're right, they're very important, and many of them are professionally degreed and educated, and in the States they would be working and making money. There are some two-income families there, husband and wife both, you know - there was one DCM whose wife was head of the school, I believe, a teacher or some such.

Q: That is our current answer to dual income, but most of those are very modest salaries for those jobs.

BLOCH: Well, I just have to tell you that the whole attitude of our government to the way that they take care of Foreign Service people, particularly the kind of money that they make available to embassies is laughable! Other countries understand that foreign representation is important and you have to have proper resources for that representation. And you know it's almost embarrassing to be from the - well, richest country in the world? the highest GNP country in the world- not the richest, but the richest if you include not only our monetary riches but the richness of our system and the freedom and creativity of the system. We are the richest; it doesn't have to be measured only monetarily -

Q: And it shouldn't be.

BLOCH: - but by many other things. So richest system in the world, and we don't provide the kind of resources for entertaining and lodging and transportation compared to, well, the Japanese, even the Chinese that have a much poorer country. But they give more for their foreign service representation. They want the best foot forward and the best image abroad. The Russians that are in poverty, believe me, they spend a lot of money on their foreign representation.

But take Australia for comparison. I think that their per capita allocation for foreign representation is much higher. Take Germany, which is probably the richest -

Q: Japan gives the officer a 40% increase if his wife goes with him to post. I don't know if that is deposited into an account for her but it is nonetheless given to the couple. The Swedes, of course, with their highly developed welfare system, have pension plans and such things. Anything like spouse compensation will not come from within the Department, it has to come from without. I have a chronology of spouse activism which I should have brought - everything that has ever taken place has been done from the outside and -

BLOCH: Well, it'll be like many things in America. Somebody will bring a good class-action lawsuit one of these days -

Q: That is my next question -

BLOCH: - and then we'll finally resolve it. Slavery was abolished, or so to speak, with the 14th Amendment. So this is kind of a form of "involuntary servitude" such as doesn't speak well for our country.

Q: And the State Department washed its hands of that that by implementing the policy on spouses in 1972. I really think the time has come for - I said this at a meeting just the other day: you have to have a class-action suit from a group of spouses.

Now, you can imagine what the problem is. What woman is going out on a limb for spouse compensation when it [would] absolutely destroy her husband's career?

BLOCH: Right. Foolish, but a difficult way -

Q: It has to be someone like you, or me -

BLOCH: A bunch of political spouses.

Q: Now the reasoning... When I phoned you the other day, I didn't realize what an august situation I would find -

BLOCH: Well, my Ambassador would say to me, well, why are you getting involved?  
[laughing] You don't need this -

Q: You don't need this!

BLOCH: But the principle is certainly there. I'd like to see it be worked out. Of course, you know then the spouses would be expected to do certain things, perform certain professional services which if they didn't, they wouldn't get paid for. I mean, maybe the answer is instead of a salary, payment based upon the time that they spend doing certain things they wouldn't ordinarily do, to get paid a certain amount for doing those things. And it might add up to \$50,000 a year or \$25,000 or \$5,000, depending on -

Q: One of the plans now is to have a spouse hired on a contract. The woman's name is Christine Shurtleff, and her husband was Ambassador to one of the West African countries, Liberia I believe but I'm not sure [Leonard Grant Shurtleff was ambassador to Congo]. She is promoting a contract for what she calls an "ORE spouse," the letters standing for Official Residence Expenses. When I was in Brazil, I spent a great deal of time as an ORE spouse managing that residence, and -

BLOCH: Well, my impression from the [ambassador designate] training session at the Department for an Ambassador's residence was that spouses of the FSOs who were actually going out to their second or third post, at the Ambassador level, but had served at other levels, were terrific. They were knowledgeable of all the rules and regulations, and of all the exposure issues and the whole business: they were right on top of it. If you had a question about gifts, the officers would turn to their spouses and ask, "What's the rule?" It's obvious that anybody that's had experience with this would know what a terrific role the spouses play.

Q: All as volunteers.

BLOCH: Yes. We've got to do something about that. I'm in favor of it 100%. I think [he laughs] our Foreign Service and the whole FS apparatus should be better funded. To me, that means it's as important as the Pentagon: quite as important as the Pentagon in today's world. So they ought to be treated with the same kind of support.

I'm surprised that we get so many best and brightest people that want to be in the Foreign Service when they aren't treated as well as they should be in terms of their respect in the community. I mean, it's just like service to your country - people say to me, "Well, how can you let your wife go off for three years to be an Ambassador some place?" I say, "Well, it's just like this: Suppose it was World War II and it was the opposite and I was a General and she was my wife, or I was a lieutenant or captain or sergeant? She'd send me off for my country. So you do these things 'for my country.'"

Q: It's a good analogy.

BLOCH: People forget about that, that we owe something to our country.

Q: You said that you were very impressed with the women in the ambassadorial seminar, and that's because they're taking care of just this type of thing.

BLOCH: Well: they're obviously studying all the books; they're obviously training as much as the Ambassadors and FSOs are. They handle all the children in the house, they handle the management of the house, they know about the rules and regulations, I mean, they're wonderful. They're all college-degreed: they'd be in some professional involvement if they were back here in the States -

Q: Talk to someone here and you say you have six servants and a driver in Brazil - "Ohhh! That sounds like pure heaven." Most people in this country don't realize what an administrative job it is [laughing] to manage a houseful of domestics.

BLOCH: The Ambassador has eight people on the inside, seven on the outside, 15 contract guards protecting the perimeter - it's not so easy.

Q: How much direct involvement does she have in supervision and care of those? Or does the resident manager take care of a lot of that?

BLOCH: Yes, but she really does call the shots. In these countries, as you know, she has to give the same direction a hundred times. You wonder why, but that's just the way it is. So, oh no, I mean, I've seen her in the kitchen showing them - and my Ambassador, more than some Ambassadors, is a world-class cook. She wasn't going to accept the kind of food they were putting on the table there. Oh, she spent hours, tens of hours, many, many hundreds of hours in the kitchen teaching the cook! Now, the next Ambassador's going to get the benefit of that. [Both laugh.] This is a residence that has the finest cuisine in all of Nepal.

Q: [laughing] Everyone fights for an invitation.

BLOCH: Yes. Chinese: We have dim sum, and sushi, and every other thing you can imagine. But she spent hours and hours personally training those people. I guess that's the job of the spouse, but there ain't no spouse there to do it. And I couldn't do it if I were there, anyway. I could play golf but -

Q: But you wouldn't be expected to.

BLOCH: Oh, just the time the Ambassador spent which a spouse would normally spend decorating the residence. Oh my Lord. You should see what it looks like- it's fabulous. It took just so many hours. Working every day, then coming home at night. Her day starts at five o'clock and ends about ten-thirty when she collapses. Every day it's just that way; five o'clock in the morning she's up working on something.

Flower arrangements! Give me any little detail: it's an enormous job. You'd pay \$100 or whatever to do beautiful flower arrangements. She does it or the spouse would do it. I'm sure you've done those and many, many others -

Q: Setting tables! Does she call you frequently?

BLOCH: We usually talk about once a week, and then we fax back and forth, particularly if we're planning a trip, as we are now.

Q: Where are you going?

BLOCH: To Tibet. We're going to drive back from there. It'll be tough but I want to do it.

Q: When will you be back?

BLOCH: In August. That's a good time to do it.

Q: Do you have any conflict of interest difficulties?

BLOCH: Well, in a place like Nepal, you don't, really, because there isn't a lot of U.S. industry there. I could see that in other places, because of our holdings, that there might be. The Ambassador's holdings are all blind trusts. That's how I set it up. I don't even know what's going on there...without our direction. I suppose in some countries, sure, you'd have more kinds of potential conflicts, but the conflict rules are solely... and there's no de minimus rule. In other words, one share of General Motors [laughing], you might make a decision, you know. One share? That's an influence? C'mon. That's a problem in my opinion, no de minimus rule. I mean, you ought to have... say, if you own less than 10% of a company or something like that, but there's no de minimus rule, so -

I don't get involved in any business over there. Unlike other folks, I suppose, or maybe not, I won't represent anybody from that country. People come to me and say, "Will you help me with this contract" or something, I don't get involved in that. I really don't have much of a foreign practice anyway to begin with, but I bend over backwards not to get involved in anything that has to do with -

Now, the one thing that we do do, I guess, in a small country like Nepal, your door's open; a lot of people come to visit you. We like that, we think that's fine, we think that's part of what an Ambassador's supposed to do: be there as a host to the extent you can be for Americans who come over there.

Q: That's the part that's very hard to measure.

BLOCH: We do it a lot, a lot.

Q: You get one measure in the response to your invitations and the enthusiasm with which people attend, but I've always felt that it's very hard to measure the effectiveness of my role as a separate spouse.

BLOCH: Yes.

Q: Not so much as the Ambassador's role; that's more -

BLOCH: That's a big job though, too, for a spouse, because people come by to have tea, to have dinner, then you have any kind of sports or recreation activities. It's a big role for a spouse. And in a small country like Nepal, I think you probably spend more time entertaining foreign and American guests because the assumption is, and they're right, is that you're very accessible.

I wouldn't think of traveling to France and calling up the U.S. Ambassador to France, or traveling to London and calling our Ambassador there, unless we were personally acquainted. But you go to a place like Nepal, everybody in the world feels like banging on the door of the American Ambassador like they're their next-door neighbor. Fine! I guess in small countries it's like that. I guess you could think of other countries where it would be like that. Particularly a place like Nepal where your tourists are one of two kinds - either rugged individualists traveling on tight budgets or the luxury adventure traveler, and the latter are pretty gutsy, so they just come and knock on the door. We don't mind. When I'm there I don't think a day goes by that there isn't somebody visiting from the United States who stops by.

Q: I think the title for your book on this experience should be "My Ambassador." [laughter]

BLOCH: Or "The First Asian-American Woman Jewish Ambassador."

Q: You're obviously very proud of her.

BLOCH: I am, I am. I miss her. She'll be home in a few months, then onto the next challenge.

Q: You said the other day that you've done your service now [laughing] when she comes home, as far as the U.S. Government is concerned.

BLOCH: As far as being separated goes. I could think of certain posts and things she could take and actually be in residence if there were something there that both of us felt - challenging. I would hope that with this experience and with the job she has done, which is you know an A plus plus plus, which is her normal job, that people would recognize the contribution and the value of her service. But you never know: at that level and with a political appointment, no one can tell you what's going to happen. It's kind of exciting and kind of nerve-wracking at the same time, because you're like a great racehorse and you just don't know what race they're going to put you in. Or they're going to put you out to pasture.

Q: Does she officially resign when she comes back?

BLOCH: Yes, her services. But that's happened in many jobs before. This is her third or fourth political appointment. She was senior executive service from 1980, so that was a tenured position. But in order to get her Food for Peace position she had to resign from the senior executive service to get a political nomination and Senate confirmation; she took that shot and was okay. I mean, if you want to get to be an Ambassador, unless you're in the Foreign Service, you've got to be political.

Q: Now, imagine an entire life like this. Not necessarily separated, because that wouldn't be the case - but imagine an entire life of three years here, four years there, two years here, a couple of years back in Washington... Your house is rented; you have to live somewhere for the 90 days home leave -

BLOCH: Well, tough but exciting.

Q: This is absolutely it: it is a very exciting and it's a fun profession.

BLOCH: Yes!

Q: And that's why I feel the State Department can get away with treating us like we're -

BLOCH: Yes, it's glamorous! It's glamorous and it's adventuresome, sure - foreign travel and knowledge of foreign countries and the children growing up in bilingual houses. It's absolutely terrific. But they shouldn't take advantage of - they definitely shouldn't take advantage of people's good will. But there's also the being uprooted thing, the dangers that you face, the diseases that you face. It's sort of a balance.

Q: One thing: I lived for seven years at two African posts. This was before AIDS. Can you imagine living there now knowing that your nursemaid for your children probably has AIDS? And your housekeeper probably has AIDS?

BLOCH: Oh Lord... It's really sad. The Ambassador has spent a lot of time in Africa. In 1976 and 1980 she was the deputy director for Africa for USIA and I think we traveled to just about every country in Africa.

Q: I talked to someone just this morning who met your Ambassador in Nairobi, and this woman was very interested in her and has followed her career since then.

BLOCH: That's one amazing thing. I said this to somebody else the other day: When the Ambassador was sworn in to the State Department, in that big Benjamin Franklin room - I mean the place was packed, and I would say that over 50% of the people were people whom Julia had worked with, going back to the Peace Corps, to fellow volunteers who'd been working beside her, below her, above her, who were there just taking pride in her achievements in this particular - it was beautiful. It was really quite beautiful. And she said, "I'm proud of this nomination but I'm also proud of the people that I worked with all the way, every single one of them".

She's had an amazing rapport with the people she worked with. When she goes to the State Department, people come jumping out of offices. That's a good feeling, when you can have an influence on somebody's life and they believe that something you said to them, or your example, something that you did inspired them to do better, or taught them something. That's a very special characteristic.

Q: It seems to me that with your support and your understanding, and with no career conflicts -

BLOCH: I think that the Ambassador actually says, and I think she's right, I don't "take credit" for what she's accomplished. Because she had to do it herself. You know, they see you up there, in a big house, and they think you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth. They don't know that when you came to Washington you were making \$15 a day and nothing else. They see you as an Ambassador, they figure somehow your family connections, or whatever. They don't realize how hard, how long - you don't start and aim for it, you just start off doing your job, taking care of those three feet in front of you at the moment.

I will say that what I did do was give her the freedom to be totally - she would have been this way anyway but she probably is more so - totally independent in her job.

Q: But you put no barriers in her way.

BLOCH: And also gave her, I think, the sense that you just do the right thing, just do the job, and when opportunity strikes you'll be ready. Just don't worry - actually, the truth probably is she would be a career government employee because Julia loves government service and would probably be best suited for a permanent secretarial post in a parliamentary system. But I think I gave her the vision to reach higher, I think, when she left the senior executive service and then for the presidential appointment. It was a big step.

Q: Because she was giving up a lot.

BLOCH: She was giving up all her seniority, all of her security in the system. It's a lot to ask of somebody. She served 24 years in the system. And I'll tell you something else that's unbelievable: how many days sick leave do you think she's taken in 24 years?

Q: [laughing] Probably none.

BLOCH: One! One day. In 24 years, one day. I used to say, "Honey, if you got paid by the hour, you'd be less than the minimum wage." [laughter] I'm serious. "Honey, if they paid you by the hour, it would be less than the minimum wage." So they got their money's worth.

I think it's been a team effort. I take a lot of pride in her success. I think we have different qualities -

Q: And they complement -

BLOCH: - and we relate, yes. We're very yin and yang. She's very unemotional, very quiet. Not so much now: she's said she had to get a little bit more aggressive to get some conversations at her dinner table. I'm very extroverted and kind of boisterous, enjoy life -

Q: [laughing] "Flamboyant" it says in here.

BLOCH: Yes, flamboyant. We're very yin and yang, I think we feed off each other to an extent.

Q: She must have had a good, warm family background, too. Close relationship with her mother?

BLOCH: No. Mostly by example. She sort of raised herself. Coming here, you know, as an immigrant, in a family as poor as you could be, and being the eldest child, a daughter. And her father was, like, in his 60s when they came here and she was nine. He was 52 when she was born. She was the eldest of three children and her mother couldn't speak English. In China her childhood was mostly with her amah, who really raised her. Her mother was there, her mother loves her, she has a wonderful relationship with her mother. And her mother is a Damon Runyon character; she's extraordinary. But mostly by example, by her father's... He was a tremendous influence on her life but not in a -

Q: Insisting that she learn English without an accent.

BLOCH: Yes, but in more of a tutorial way as opposed to a passionate relationship. It was almost competitive in a way. No, she loves her father very much. And actually I have a closer relationship with her father anyway. He and I were closer than any of the children because we talked a lot. I wasn't his child; I was an adult when I met him. We spent tremendous amounts of time together. He was an extraordinary individual, with his wisdom on things. Some of the things he said - those are engraved in stone in the Ambassador's brain. Simple, simple truths. Simple: "Do the right thing." I remember him saying that the first day that I met him. The other one he told me: "The secret to getting along and having a happy marriage, is never argue with a woman, especially my wife and daughter." [laughter] No: it was "never argue with a woman from Shanghai, especially my wife and daughter." [more laughter] No, my life has been tremendously enriched by my understanding of the Chinese and their culture and their values. I'm always reading a lot about the Chinese.

Q: She went with you on the trip to Israel -

BLOCH: She loves the Jewish history and the - a lot of the value systems of the Chinese and Jewish, the educational emphasis and family, ancestor-worshipping, remembering birth dates and dates of death, and the whole business - oh, Judaism. The Jews and the Chinese have a lot in common culturally - they have better food [laughter] but you can't get really good food, you know, when you're wandering around the world all the time. But if you look at the variety of Jewish food - good: oh God, that is a way of life with the Chinese. Food and mahjong, that's something else.

To watch the reaction of the host country folks and the diplomatic community to an American Ambassador, a woman, and then a Chinese, it's phenomenal, it is just phenomenal. And to me it's the wave of the future in diplomacy because, you see, I don't think that we have the resources - our influences, in my opinion, in spite of what anybody says, is less and less and less, and the influence of the Germans and the Japanese and, in a place like Nepal, the Chinese, is going to be greater and greater. And I think the way we overcome that is through appointing Ambassadors that have, first of all, tremendous intellectual qualities and linguistic abilities, as the Ambassador does, but also there is a public relations value that we can get out of the Ambassador that nobody can get.

The Germans can't send over a Chinese woman, the Japanese can't send over a Chinese woman. The Canadians might be able to, that's possible, and they're sending over a lot more women; the Australians are sending over a lot more women. They're using that card, it's very, very clever. My point is that we have an opportunity - and I'm talking about all the other ethnics that are qualified to serve: they're sort of a public relations external affairs benefit to having this kind of an Ambassador, this package.

She has much, much more influence than we would ordinarily have, as a result of the fabric that she brings to bear. The prime minister of the country calls her every day to ask her advice on this or that or the other thing; what's her opinion on this, and so on. And that's a tremendous value to serving your country, and I'd like to see that more and more in the future: using the strength of our diversity in foreign diplomacy. It is still a bastion of lily-white WASPs - and maybe your husband, with an Italian name like Guido ran into some of that, maybe, in terms of his ethnic diversity(?) - but it's a very WASPy operation.

[Fenzi explains that her husband was brought up by his American mother, who was from Connecticut.]

BLOCH: So he's one of these WASPs! [both laughing] Well, the Foreign Service is mostly made up of Princeton, Yale, -

Q: Guido went to Berkeley. Stanford, USC and Berkeley have been the traditional West Coast schools that have fed into the Foreign Service.

BLOCH: I just think that the Foreign Service is going to have to be creative. Because the absolute quantitative dominance that we've had in the world is dissipating. I mean, the President today is at a meeting of the GS-7 in Munich. It used to be that when the U.S. had a sniffle, they all had colds. It's just not the case anymore. So we have to use our other talents, our talents of persuasion and of principle. I think that we just have to reach out among our people and bring in all the talented people that we can, in as diverse a way as possible. I think, for example, sending Ed Perkins to the UN was a great idea. He's got to be dynamite up there, eh?

Q: However, his predecessor, Tom Pickering, was very effective too.

BLOCH: Oh, he was maybe the best.

Q: It will be interesting to see what Ed Perkins does. But I think you're right, I think we need that diversity. And I think some of the "diversity" that we need is a more official involvement of all of these women, like us, the spouses, who go out and learn a great deal and - I keep getting back to this - my husband tells me I sound like a broken record - but until we bring them back into the system -

BLOCH: I didn't realize it but in 1972 I was designated as a nonentity. I never realized that.

Q: Yes, you were. You were dealt out of the system. Do read the article [about the '72 directive and two commentaries on its consequences] [the] current issue of Foreign Service Journal?

BLOCH: You're not like a broken record; you're what they say "going past the close" - the famous term in selling, you know, you "close" the deal? You're going past the close.

Q: [laughing] "Forget it, the deal is closed." You don't think we can reopen it?

BLOCH: Oh, I think you can reopen it; I think your point is well made. You keep repeating yourself and I understand your point, and you're preaching to the choir.

Q: [laughing again] I keep hoping you'll give me some advice, I guess.

BLOCH: No, I've got too many other causes to fry -

Q: No, but I think your class action suit - that's what I've said is the answer.

BLOCH: Well, that's probably the way it's going to go for somebody, a class action. Probably a suit for back wages.

Q: What's the statute of limitations on that?

BLOCH: I don't know, I'm not an expert on that but there are people who specialize in that. You ought to find one of these famous trial lawyers that does this kind of stuff, who maybe brought it on behalf, as a suit - like the one brought on behalf of the airline stewardesses. It took years and years and years, and they finally got their back pay. Something about age discrimination, I believe. It used to be that all stewardesses were unmarried, between the ages of so-and-so.

Q: I remember that case. There has been a class action suit successfully prosecuted by the women FSO's, who protested that they weren't given equal assignment, but as you say, it took 14 years and most of those who filed the suit are retired and gone from the Department in one way or another but at least they opened the doors for their successors. And we always say in the Foreign Service that we opened the door for the people who came behind us. Guido and I were out of pocket for education for 14 years! Every time that we left a post, because we'd been out of pocket and he'd done his proper bureaucratic lobbying, the people who followed us got the increased allowance and we went on to the next post.

BLOCH: You mean paying for the education?

Q: Yes. We were always out of pocket. Like in Nepal: if there's an American school there, the education allowance will be based on the tuition at that school in Katmandu or wherever it might be. If you want to send your child to Deerfield Academy, as we did, you make up the difference between the tuition at the two schools.

BLOCH: You know, you had an interesting problem phenomenon. I find that FSOs who serve in countries like Nepal or Third World countries like in Africa, have to send their children away to school. That's a heck of a sacrifice, both for your children and for you.

Q: Of course it is. The one thing it does do, if it works, which it did with our children, is that it draws you together when you are together.

BLOCH: That's nice, they really cherish the time that you're together, they know that the week or the day will end and they'll have to go back to school.

Q: Yes; and now, it's back to jobs and spouses. [consulting her notes] "Faxes and occasional visits"... But it doesn't make up for -

BLOCH: I've been to Nepal eleven times in my "occasional visits." I've got to be setting a world record for commuter marriages. I should be in the Guinness Book of Records: anybody who's been around the world eleven times in three years.

Q: Do you stop at other places?

BLOCH: I usually go to Katmandu but last summer, for instance, we went off to Russia, and spent some time in Norway with our Ambassador there, Loret Miller Ruppe, a wonderful person, and her husband Phil. And we've been to Burm[Myanmar] and to China two or three times, Thailand many times, India, Australia, New Zealand...

Q: What we all do!

BLOCH: Yes. We take advantage of being there. The thing about the Ambassador coming home, and I think she's right, is that she says, "Well, I come home, it's not going to be a vacation, I'm going to work. They're going to want me on the Hill, they'll want me at the Department, on TV, on radio - forget it." And I agree with her.

Q: And so you go there and get to see -

BLOCH: We go on these marvelous vacations. Let me tell you: that's great quality time together, there's nothing better than that. People say, "Well, you're not together." But when we're together, it's just like with your children, we're really seriously "together."

Q: Something I read in one of these articles, perhaps the one about you specifically, that your parents didn't come to your wedding.

BLOCH: When we got married, remember, it was 1968, a long time ago, and it wasn't unusual for people in those days, though I think times have changed, to not bless and to disown children who married "out of the faith," and you're out of the faith when you marry a person of a different ethnic background. That's hard for your average Midwesterner to swallow. So they didn't come to the wedding but my brothers did and my mother-in-law did and Julia's family did. We had a great wedding. Friends came and, really, over the years my parents learned a lot from that mistake, probably the highest-price mistake they ever made in terms of emotional relationships. When my father was ill and then passed away a couple of years ago, we had all but made up by the close of that year.

But when I went to his house, saw on his desk, there while we were talking, a picture of my sister - his own daughter and the love of his life apart from my mother - right next to that picture was one of him and the Ambassador when she received an honorary degree at Northeastern University. He was very proud of that picture and another one of her at the State Department. It all worked out, it really all worked out. And part of it working out was, well, had they come to the wedding, they might not have appreciated everything so much. So, "all's well that ends well," it's safe to say.

Q: That sounds like a good place to stop.

BLOCH: Agreed!

\*\*\*

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse's Name: Julia Chang Bloch

Spouse Entered Service:9/89Left Service: N/AYou Entered Service:9/89Left Service: N/A

Status: Spouse of non-career AEP

Posts:N/A; Spouse at AmEmbassy, Katmandu, Nepal

Spouse's Position: Non-career ambassador to Nepal

Place/Date of birth: Detroit, Michigan; November 5, 1942

Parents (Name, Profession):

Howard Bloch, deal-maker

Pauline Bloch, housewife

Schools (Prep, University):

University of Miami, BA 1964

Harvard Law School, LLB 1967

Date/Place of Marriage: New York City, December 21, 1968

Profession: Attorney

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:A. At Post: N/A

B. In Washington, DC: See "Kalorama Chic", Washingtonian, April 1987

Honors:See "Caped crusader", Washington Jewish Week, April 25, 1991

End of interview