

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

BETTY ATHERTON

Interviewed by: Mary Louise Weiss

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Q: This is Mary Louise Weiss on October 2, 1987, and I am interviewing Betty Atherton in her home in Washington, D.C. for the Foreign Service Family Oral History Project.

Betty, I thought I'd ask you first of all how you first got interested in the mental health issues in the Foreign Service relating to families, because that was where I first began working with you on some of those things.

ATHERTON: It goes a long way back. My early experience in the Foreign Service was really very unhappy for a variety of reasons I'll probably go into later. I kept having this dream that there must be some way that a wife could really be a full participant in what was always called the "Two For the Price of One" team, and I never really felt that I was accepted as a full partner. I saw myself as one, but I didn't feel that the State Department cared one whit whether I was at post or not. I felt I was sometimes being indulged and sometimes chastised, but I never felt a full partner.

When Clarke Slade was the educational advisor in the State Department years ago, we were having some difficulties with one of our children's education. I went to see Clarke and in the course of talking with him about our child, I mentioned how I felt about the Foreign Service, and he said, "Well, why don't you dream. Just dream." So I went home and I dreamed. I wrote a paper that I titled "My Dream", and I sent it to him. It started out by saying that I dreamed that Roy had come home and said that we had been accepted in the Foreign Service, that we were going to Washington, that my way was being paid, that I would have per diem, that I would have orientation, that I would have language training, that whatever he did I would be doing because we would be going out as a team. I went on from that. I dreamed about a hostel here in Washington where children with Foreign Service parents could be on vacation, where there would be probably a retired Foreign Service couple who would be in charge of it; there would be a psychologist; there would be a counselor; there would be the kinds of people to help our children when we were out of the country. It went on and on like that.

That, as I said, was a long time ago. When Roy kept going up the ladder in the State Department I suddenly realized that maybe I might help make some of these dreams come true. Dr. (Frank K.) Johnson, who was a psychologist (child psychiatrist) with the medical unit in the department, read my paper and called me up one day and said, "Would you like to be on the Mental Health Committee? It sounds to me as if this is something you would be interested in." I went down and had a long chat with him. Sally Moore was on the committee at the time. We talked about our dreams. That meeting was the beginning of my recognition that if anything were going to change, it would only change by the people who wanted and saw the need for the change.

Actually I didn't do much about it at that time. I was teaching and had a lot of other things on my mind, but very shortly after I stopped teaching full-time in 1977, I was asked if I would continue on the Mental Health Committee but more actively. Very shortly I became the chairman of the Mental Health Committee, and that's when we really started talking about what we could do for families. The first thing that we were able to put together, after some false starts, was what we called "The Kabul Experience", which was taped by USIA and distributed to posts. It was just a wonderful coming together of all the people who had been involved in Kabul in a supportive program for families with Dr. Westmas (a private psychologist from Michigan). All of the people who had been involved in that-the ambassador, (T. Eliot, Jr.), the DCM, their spouses, Dr. Westmas, and two others, were either in the vicinity of Washington and we were able to get among OBC, the medical unit and Personnel enough money to put on the program in the East Auditorium (of State Department).

Q: It was very successful and very well attended.

ATHERTON: Secretary Vance came; he gave the welcoming remarks. Everyone expected him to leave right after his welcome. Instead, he stayed all the way through. Mrs. Vance, of course, was a strong supporter of all this. She was really the person who made my efforts succeed. She was there, and she had also invited several spouses of congressmen. So it was very very well received, and I think was, in many ways, a turning point for the medical unit in the State Department recognizing that there were things that one could do in the way of preventive mental health to make life happier in the Foreign Service, an idea which unfortunately the medical unit had not really considered very important or at least not their responsibility up until then.

Q: I think Dr. Johnson had led a really good fight while he was there, and the Mental Health Advisory Committee was a wonderful forum to bring wives together with medical officers and AID, personnel people and USIS.

ATHERTON: It was a good communications channel for sharing. I was saying how unfortunate it is that it takes disasters to have people recognize the human side of conditions. I must say that after the Iran evacuation, as a result of our establishing the Iran Evacuee Support Network Program-in giving the evacuees an opportunity to meet with several officials in Management, thus offering logistics assistance to the evacuees-gave impetus to the Department to finally understand. (Then during) the subsequent evacuations the Family Liaison Office (FLO) was finally recognized as the proper place for caring for families who had been evacuated. An evacuation officer was hired and there was much more attention paid to the conditions of the family as well as of the employee after being forced to leave the post. The Overseas Briefing Center (OBC) had an increase in its funds to do more community building, and people were encouraged to attend the security program. In fact, attendance was mandatory for a while. I don't know if it still is. But at least there were more attempts to help people learn how to cope with emergencies such as evacuation, rather than, as in the old days, saying, "Don't worry, we'll take care of you." They did (the State Department), to the extent that they would get you out of the danger zone, but as I said earlier, that was just the beginning.

Q: It took someone like yourself and a few others on our side to prod the Department, but the Department had earlier been prodded and made aware when Dr. Johnson came in and was working on the Drug Abuse Prevention Program. That developed and went down this same road.

ATHERTON: The difficulty is that there is no historical memory in the department. I tried (to find it) when we were doing our report on evacuations. I talked with people who had been involved in previous evacuations to find out if there were some documents that indicated how many evacuations there had been, how many people had been evacuated, how many had gone back to post-just some good statistics-nobody knew. There were no records. They could tell you about the employees to some extent, but as for families, they had no idea.

Q: I think one reason is that some reports that had been written by the Forum Committee (AAFSW) by individuals to various offices were filed away or taken when someone left an office. Because of the turnover there wasn't the continuity in each office, the turnover of interests, too.

ATHERTON: And a little back burner treatment as well on more vital issues.

I remember when I was talking one time with Mrs. Vance-I did a great deal on this for she was so supportive, I said to her, "Well, this is a decision that only the Secretary can make. I don't want to bother him." And she said, "Why not? After all, he's the Secretary of State." So in reality I would say that the many things that were put in place for families and that therefore influenced the employees' lives as well, were because the Vances were there. They cared.

Q: And that got reflected all around.

ATHERTON: Once the message comes down from on high to move something off the back burner, it gets on the front burner very quickly. I think that's what happened. The tone was set. Ben Read (Under Secretary for Management) was most cooperative. Everyone really responded when they recognized that he considered something was important.

Q: We were fortunate then.

ATHERTON: Very fortunate. The Family Liaison Office was started at that time.

Q: A lot of things fell into place. Betty, the evacuations and the interest that focused on the families-family concerns, not only the evacuation side of it but other concerns-led to more interest in the children. Eventually the adolescents set up their own AWAL, Around the World in a Lifetime, and also the foreign-born spouses (organized their own support group). I think this was all in the same period ....

ATHERTON: Exactly. I was thinking of the children again. It was as a result of this consciousness-raising that there were families that accompanied many Foreign Service officers to post, that helped the Department decide to have a full-time education officer in the Family Liaison Office. Prior to that such support came only from AAFSW and AFSA. Finally, the Department recognized that this, too, was important. So many things fell into place with the recognition that families were important.

Q: And Clarke Slade came into Med (Department of State Medical Office).

ATHERTON: And they increased the number of psychiatrists and counselors. They also opened the Employee Services program, which now has three full-time professionals. There is much more being done in what I would call the preventive mental health side.

Q: Also, I found that when I went to Mental Health Committee meetings, more wives who were coming back from abroad were becoming social workers. There seemed to be a wave of that, and eventually they formed their own organization (The Association of American Foreign Service Clinical Social Workers).

ATHERTON: Yes, they did. It's interesting that there was finally a recognition that there were many needs in the field particularly for people who had master's (degrees) in social work and counseling. Sheila Platt, for instance, was actually asked by the State Department to go on TDY from her post in Africa to one post in Europe to assist a Foreign Service family that was having difficulties. This was the kind of dream that we in the Mental Health Committee had had, that Foreign Service spouses, with professional qualification and already in the field ought to be considered resources in time of crisis and tapped to deal with such crises.

Q: Just the way Foreign Service officers are tapped to (respond to an emergency elsewhere).

ATHERTON: Exactly.

Q: And then you got involved with the Briefing Center?

ATHERTON: The Overseas Briefing Center. Yes, I'd always had a warm spot in my heart for that because it seemed to be the only place, until the Family Liaison Office came along, where families were of any significance. So, yes, I've worked with the Overseas Briefing Center with the people who are going out for the first time, also with the spouses of ambassadors-designate.

When we went to Cairo in 1979, I told Roy my dream for that fast-growing community was that all my thoughts and ideas about a full support program overseas, similar to what one has here (in the U.S.), might come to fruition. The first thing I did was get to know as many of the leaders of the community as possible, not only within the Embassy but the entire American community which was growing by leaps and bounds at that point. I learned that there had been earlier attempts to start some kind of a counseling program but that it didn't have enough support and had fallen through. In due course I met the people, the leaders, who could make things happen.

We came back to D.C. in February of '80 right after (President) Reagan had been sworn in, for the Sadat state visit. I went to check in, with MED, as I always do. The executive director of MED, Jerry Rose, asked me, "Are you going to get that mental health program off the ground in Cairo?" I said, "Well, I haven't even been there a year yet, but I am meeting the people who are going to."

Q: It had been started when you first arrived?

ATHERTON: No, they had tried it. There had been a survey of a small part of the community, not the official community.

Q: Had you received the seed money yet?

ATHERTON: No, no, nothing. The Department had nothing to do with that survey. It was strictly the Maadi Community Church and people from the non-official American community who had seen the need for such a program, but it had not gotten off the ground at all.

So Jerry said, "You know, there is a couple leaving Kuala Lumpur where they have been doing a very similar program to this for four years. You ought to grab them." And I said, "But we don't have any money. We don't have anything." And he said, "Well, you better get cracking because they'll be finding a place."

We returned to Cairo, and by April I had talked to the people again, Roy had written a letter to the heads of the different businesses, we had a meeting of the business people at the Embassy with Roy presiding, and we showed "The Kabul Experience". The business people's mouths fell open when they saw Cy Vance (Secretary of State) sitting there, listening avidly and really caring. We had follow-up discussions, and by May we were able to borrow some money from the Cairo American College, money which if they didn't spend they would lose, and we borrowed it on the condition we'd pay it back right away.

With that money, we brought the couple in Kuala Lumpur to Cairo for a week's visit. We had a look at them; they had a look at us. There was instant mutual understanding and appreciation. In September (1980) they returned to start the new program. I spent a whole summer writing letters to all the American corporations with representatives in Cairo, asking for contributions. We got the money. Gale Metcalf and Joel Wallach were the couple. They came with their son Joshua, who was eight months old when he arrived in Cairo. They have just left (Oct. 1987) after all these years and are now in Taiwan where they are establishing a similar program for the community there. It was the Community Services Association, as we called it.

Q: Of Cairo?

ATHERTON: Just Community Services Association. It is for all English-speaking people in Cairo and environs.

Q: Tell me more about it. What services did it offer?

ATHERTON: Well, it started out in a nice modest way while Gale and Joel got to know the people, to build the confidence of the community in Gale and Joel, and for them to identify the community's needs. So it started out with a little continuing education program-Arabic lessons.

Q: Was this at the college?

ATHERTON: No. The Embassy gave us, rent-free, two apartments until the inspectors came along, and then we had to pay the rent. The apartment on the second floor was for Gale and Joel, the other, on the ground floor, was the CSA office. These were apartments that nobody wanted to live in, after the new embassy apartments were built, so they had gone begging for some time. The Embassy had continued paying rent on them anyway, so it seemed an ideal use for them. The Embassy also helped furnish them. With the money from business contributions, we hired a secretary.

So we started out with Gale and Joel and a secretary. From the beginning, the continuing ed program paid for itself—people paid to attend classes, and the teachers were paid from the tuition fees. The classes were held at CSA and at Cairo American College, which is about only a ten-minute walk from CSA.

Q: Did Metcalf and Wallach run only counseling services, or did they run other courses and programs?

ATHERTON: They started out with the continuing ed because that was a good way to acquaint people with the program and not scare them off because of the preventive mental health aspect. Gale and Joel were quickly accepted by the community. They taught part-time at Cairo American College, a course on human relations. So that way they got to know the children and the teachers when they were on the campus. They did counseling, they developed orientation programs for newcomers, an orientation program for new students and staff at Cairo American College, and eventually counseling.

There were people who asked me, after we started Community Services Association, "Why? After all, Cairo is a wonderful place to live. You've got the pyramids, and you've got the sphinx, and it's very exotic." It's a fair question. Cairo is, on the other hand, a very congested city. Maadi, in the suburbs where most of the foreigners live, is also quite congested. In '79 and '80 traffic was unbelievable; it would take as much as an hour and a half to drive ten miles from Maadi to Cairo. There were a lot of little annoyances which, in isolation, were not stressful, but when you put them all together they were. Also, the American community grew from about 35 Americans in 1974, when diplomatic relations were restored, to over two-thousand Americans. The Embassy alone, including AID and the military missions, numbered about 600 employees.

Q: Isn't it the largest AID program in the world?

ATHERTON: It is, and because the military are also part of the Embassy, Cairo is the largest mission in the world. The people in the whole American community are extremely diverse, so that you don't have, as you would in a small post, quite the same kind of homogeneity. There were and are many needs to be met.

We had a large number of oil company people, where the men were in the oil fields of offshore sites for two weeks and came back to their families for two weeks. That's a disruptive kind of life, a very stressful life. Also, in 1980 there was the all-pervasive drug problem in the school. One of the first things that Gale and Joel did was to advise Cairo American College on the subject of what to do about the drugs and what to do about the children who actually cause damage to school property. They recommended that the families go back to the States and get the children settled in boarding schools that were adequate to deal with such problems before the parents returned to Cairo.

Q: Were there many teenagers there while you were there? What did they do during the summer? Were there any employment opportunities?

ATHERTON: Eventually there were. Some of the businesses and the Embassy and CSA had an employment program. Also, Community Services Association ran a summer program where the teenagers were involved, with adult supervision. This was a program for children from first grade through sixth grade.

It was a very good program. For two summers I offered a summer studies skills program similar to the one I did down at Kingsbury Lab School for junior-high students in a one-on-one tutoring.

We developed, working very closely with the Egyptian Government's Ministry of Information, a series of telephone tapes, so that one could dial a number, like a hotline, and ask for a particular tape. Some of the tapes were: "Being New in Cairo," "Signals of a Heart Attack," "How to Deal With Depression," "Hepatitis," "Problems With Young Children," "Coping With Stress," "Animal Bites," "Finding and Employing Household Help." These were one to three-minutes long, and said for further information, come to CSA. It was wonderful for a person who was feeling lonely to just dial CSA and say, I would like to hear tape No. 99 on being lonely.

Q: Who was managing the tapes? ATHERTON: Gale and Joel did all of this ....

Q: Was it certain hours of the day or evening?

ATHERTON: There were about eighteen hours; we had the office open about eighteen hours a day with volunteers. When I left in '83, there were something like fifty volunteers, and I'm told there are over a hundred now.

Q: You were keeping a lot of people busy who otherwise might not know what to do.

ATHERTON: The other thing I guess that might be somewhat unique about Cairo, (certainly there are many other countries where this would apply), and that is the language. Arabic is not an easy language to learn. There is an extra isolation factor if you don't speak the language. So, finding someone who speaks English or who hears English on the telephone, can be very, very helpful.

Q: Was there a large business community? American...

ATHERTON: Very large, very large. American, British and French.

Q: And they helped support CSA?

ATHERTON: Yes, they did, from the beginning. I would say they provided about 90% of the support. I should add that what also got us going besides the money we borrowed from CAC (Cairo American College), was the seed money that we received from the State Department Mental Health Grants. Those grants continued every year, usually a little less each year, and that was the State Department's contribution to CSA.

Q: Do you remember how much the first seed money was?

ATHERTON: Twenty thousand dollars. Out of that we were able to repay Cairo American College and pay part of Gale and Joel's salaries. Then we got contributions. We increased the tuition fees for the continuing education and the other programs, trying to keep them reasonable but still making them cover the costs. For counseling there was a fee, except for children; there was no fee for counseling children. And the programs-I was just looking at the 1983 budget which is quite different from what it is now. Our programs income covered 50% of our costs, with 32% from grants and donations from the business community, 16% from the grant from the State Department, and 3% was other monies we got. Today I believe the program income takes care of about 70% of the total budget with grants, and contributions covering the balance.

Q: Do they depend on fund-raising programs or efforts in order to supplement any of this?

ATHERTON: To start with we did. We had barbecues (chuckle), largely barbecues because those were very popular there, but most of the money came from getting the corporations to have their home offices make a donation every year through their own foundations.

Q: Was there any resistance to setting this up originally?

ATHERTON: No. The Ambassador was for it, so not too many people were against it. If they were, they were awfully quiet. No, there really wasn't. What we did do was to make sure that the Egyptian Government was informed all along the line. It was interesting-we had to be very, very careful on the question about registering, because once you go into the business of registering, as anything in Cairo, you have maybe two or three years down the road before you can actually do anything. And so the advice that was given us was that we just continue doing what we were doing. It was (there's a wonderful term for it), because there were some people who were very concerned that we ought to be definitely registered. An Egyptian friend of mine said, 'We call it extra-legal.'

Q: So the government did not resist, but were supporting you in their own way, helping you.

ATHERTON: Yes, absolutely. With the telephone tapes we wanted to be sure that we weren't running into any difficulties or showing insensitivity of the Egyptians. Many of the volunteers wrote the original drafts, and at least three of us reviewed them and put them into final draft form. We then submitted them for approval to the Ministry of Information where there were two Egyptians who were very interested in this who had lived in the States and understood what this was all about. Anything that they felt should not go on the telephone tapes they recommended that we put out in pamphlet form. For instance, in a country where drinking is frowned on because of religious taboos, our information on alcoholism we didn't put on tape; we just prepared the brochure. Eventually, we prepared brochures on all the teletape topics.

Q: Were those printing costs part of the budget, or were there any volunteer printers?

ATHERTON: No, we paid for the printing, but printing was not all that expensive - as long as we had it camera-ready.

So it was going great. I was chairman (of the board) for the first three years. The Director of AID then became chairman, followed by the head of AMOCO in Cairo. The fourth chairman was the head of the Office of Military Cooperation at the Embassy. They were looking for his replacement when I was out there in July, and they were hoping they could persuade the new AID Director to do it. I don't know if they have or not.

CSA has clout and it's very well recognized. About 2,000 people attend the continuing education courses in any given year.

Q: You get a lot of credit for that. You really launched it. I also want to put in a little kudos for Roy Atherton who was Ambassador. In this article on Foreign Service families in the State News of June '81, it said, "Ambassadors must be community leaders."

ATHERTON: Hear! Hear!

Q: I think that's the right attitude. Roy Atherton said so and did so, and it worked. He was a wonderful example.

ATHERTON: And it worked.

Q: Then you came back to Washington.

ATHERTON: Then we came back to Washington in late '83, and Roy became Director General. Following along with this mental health theme, and then we can leave it alone for a while, at the time that he became Director General, there had been a question raised on the subject of child and spouse abuse in the Foreign Service, and of course that had been on the back burner for a long, long time, a very cold back burner. Roy felt that he had enough evidence, that is, indications that it needed to be looked at. While he was Director General, he put that in motion (in the form of a study) that was really trying to define who has responsibility for what you do when there are spouse and child abuse cases. The military have dealt with it for a long time, and it's still a very dicey thing for them. But the State Department has never touched it, so I have to admit quite honestly-I haven't followed through, but I know-that that was put into motion.

The other action that Roy got from the back burner into action was the whole idea of a continuing emergency plan with committees that meet regularly with the State Department and try to keep up-to-date on what to do in case of emergency and crisis, a recommendation of the Crisis Report which the AAFSW put together. He had a task force working on that, and that finally was approved and has been implemented.

Q: When you came back did you continue to do any of these same things you had done before with the Briefing Center?

ATHERTON: I picked up right away with the Briefing Center and worked there. That's when I began the revision of the Ambassador's Spouse Notebook, and I also continued with the panel discussions for spouses of ambassadors-designate.

This is interesting: when we came back, Roy was brought back along with Ron Spiers and Bill Harrop by Secretary Shultz to form a new management team. We knew that before we left Cairo. I said to Roy, "We should talk with Gale and Joel, because if you're going to have a new management team and it's going to be a team, it won't be a team until you get to know each other outside the State Department." Out of that came the Wye Retreat at the Wye Plantation on the Eastern Shore. There were about thirty of us altogether; the spouses were invited. FLO was involved, the Overseas Briefing Center, and of course Management.

Q: Was the AAFSW president there?

ATHERTON: The AAFSW president was indeed there. What Roy and I did was to make a list of all the people that ought to be there, and insisted that certainly the spouses of the key people should be there because they could be in plenary sessions, and they could have separate sessions, as we all had something to contribute. Roy sold this plan so well that Ron Spiers takes credit for it now, and I think that's wonderful, because once someone takes credit, he or she buys into it. We were at Wye for a whole weekend.

Q: It was the first of its kind.

ATHERTON: The first of its kind. The officers wanted Mark Moore to assist them. We talked with Mark at Harvard at the Kennedy School of Administration. Mark came. He was the moderator because I think that everyone was scared to death that nothing would happen and they would waste the whole weekend if they didn't have someone to keep them on track. We had plenary sessions, and we had separate sessions, and we had plenary sessions. It was from that weekend-and there was a subsequent one a year-and-a-half later-that the team really became a team.

Q: Was the follow-up the same team?

ATHERTON: Yes. And then Roy retired. But I think that a lot of the spirit and really team effort that eventually came to fruition was a result of that weekend retreat when we had 48 hours plus together.

Q: There's no question that getting away as a group you see things in perspective together, and to be with wives and husbands was wonderful.

ATHERTON: Perhaps the most telling anecdote is that we had our plenary session and we had our separate session, and then we had a final plenary on that Sunday morning. It started to snow and people were getting a little antsy about getting away before there was a real snowstorm. In that one, one of the points that Fanchon Silberstein brought up, (who was at that time head of OBC), was that women generally did not like to be referred to as dependents. Ron Spiers said, "I never thought of that. Why?"

Q: He would have if he had been a dependent.

ATHERTON: So we had a great time helping the management side recognize that a lot of the jargon which they use and doesn't mean anything to them, is really offensive.

Q: You don't mean throw out in the sense of discard, but you mean talking it out in our direction? What a breakthrough.

ATHERTON: There were a lot of breakthroughs, because I think for all of us we looked at the Foreign Service through others' eyes, and gained new perspectives.

Q: Was there anyone there from MED, the Medical Office?

ATHERTON: No.

Q: But it was Mark Moore from Harvard who directed the weekend's discussions.

ATHERTON: It turned out, however, that Foreign Service officers don't need too much direction. They may need a little "time" calling now and then, but actually they were a very cohesive group and the chairmanship of each of the sessions was rotated with the senior people. Of course, there had been a session prior to that, an information session in the State Department where the top civil service person in the Department briefed us on the Civil Service in the State Department. There was a lot of consciousness raising and recognition that there was more to the State Department than just the Foreign Service, that we were really two parts working together. It was tremendously informative. It was four hours a session for two Saturday mornings before we went to Wye. A lot of work went into it. They finally found in the archives information on when someone had previously tried to do something about the Department, and they used that to give us more background.

Q: How far back was that, do you know?

ATHERTON: I think the farthest back they went was the Rogers Act of 1946, when there was the first real reform, at which point people who were not wealthy could become Foreign Service Officers, because that Act increased salaries and provided other benefits such as paid home leave.

They also talked about the Wriston Report of 1955 or '56 which eliminated Budget and Fiscal and other staff positions. It kind of turned things around. It made everyone eligible to be a Foreign Service officer. A lot of our best budget and fiscal people left because they didn't want to do anything but what they knew they did best, i.e., budget and fiscal work.

Q: It brought in a lot of people laterally who couldn't have...

ATHERTON: That's right. It designated some positions in the State Department as Foreign Service, and some positions overseas as Civil Service, with the result that a lot of Civil Service people who wanted to stay in Washington found themselves overseas, and some people overseas in the Foreign Service found themselves back in Washington. It was a very unhappy time.

Q: I would think that those pre-Wye weekend preparation sessions were very unifying. Have the results of that continued?

ATHERTON: Very much so. As far as I know, there's been a quiet implementation. I think, for instance, the whole management side of the Department has been strengthened with career people, so that you don't have a political appointee who's the Under Secretary for Management, and what does he know about the Foreign Service, or Civil Service for that matter.

I would say that while one can't directly go back and say this or that was the result of Wye, certainly the atmosphere and climate that was created there, the work that went into it, and the knowledge that people gained from it, certainly affected the Management style in the Department. Of course, Secretary Shultz has been extremely supportive.

Q: Oh, he is very supportive, outspokenly so.

ATHERTON: It's just too bad that it all came at the time of the budget cut.

Q: I was just going to say, the budget has devastated so many things that were really advancing or wanting to be advanced, such as the Foreign Service Associates program.

ATHERTON: Which was an outcome of Wye. The germ of that idea was at Wye when Sue Low carried it to its very logical conclusion. (We were) just trying to give scope to Foreign Service spouses, whether they wanted to be volunteers or whether they wanted to work-just making some kind of sense out of their disjointed lives, and the need for recognition.

Q: Their need for recognition, and not just recognition but a kind of service or employment.

ATHERTON: It was a marvelous idea. It was the first thing to be cut when the Department decided to make cuts. Those cuts are a lot deeper now.

Q: Let's hope the Foreign Service Associates program doesn't remain on the back burner, but just set there temporarily aside.

ATHERTON: Well, we'll just have to wait until times are better before we can raise that one again. (laughter)

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Q: This is November 6 (1987) at Betty Atherton's, continuing with the interview, part two.

ATHERTON: When we were last talking, we mentioned the idea of doing some training and preparation for people going overseas, and I just wanted to share with you what has happened most recently. At the Overseas Briefing Center, I have for several years been involved in two particular programs. One of them is the final day of the two-week American Studies Seminar for people going abroad, most of them for the first time, some of them taking it simply because they never had it before. That last day we have a panel discussion which is called The Foreign Service; a Pro-active Approach. We have two other spouses besides myself who share our experiences of having lived overseas-what we've done, what we've found to be very positive, and, of course, some of the negatives as well, which I think is very helpful for those who are going out for the first time-recognizing that there will be some differences and some adjustments, but a lot of good time, too.

The other program that I've been involved with has been the afternoon program for the spouses of ambassadors-designate. This is for both the political and the career ambassadors-designate's spouses. We've evolved a program that we have felt was adequate, but one always wants to make sure that it is meeting the needs.

Just two days ago we had a brainstorm session at the Overseas Briefing Center with twenty women who ranged in age from about thirty-five/forty to sixty/seventy maybe, all of whom had been in senior positions in posts abroad. We broke up into small groups and talked about what makes for a good post. We addressed four areas that we identified as crucial. One was the community relations and the role the spouse of a senior employee might play. Another was representation and protocol, including assisting junior people in some protocol that they were not accustomed to. Another one had to do with what we call the private versus public role of a senior spouse. The fourth was the relations among the CLO (Community Liaison Officer) at post, senior spouse and the DCM's spouse.

After good discussions in the small groups, we came back to a plenary where we listed what we felt were topics that needed to be addressed in the training programs. We then had another small group session where each small group came up with a very specific plan for how to do this kind of training. Out of this another senior spouse and I are going to be developing a training module for the program for the spouses of ambassadors-designate.

I found myself wondering, as we were doing it, however, whether it would ever really change, whether there would be that much not only interest, but whether there would be any money in these time of budget cuts. Particularly since that very morning we learned that Sue Parsons, Director of the Family Liaison Office, had been required to justify the existence of the CLOs and the FLO-that it might well be that because of the budget cuts these positions might have to be eliminated.

One wonderful thing that has come so far intact through all of the budget cuts, has been the Overseas Briefing Center and the Foreign Service Institute in general. There has been a commitment on the part of the management of the State Department that while we are going through very hard times now, we must look to the future. And the future lies in the training of the people who will be our Foreign Service officers in the next generation.

So far the program seems to be in place, and hopefully from that brainstorming session we will be able to come up with even more relevant training for these spouses of senior employees. So that kind of finishes that chapter.

There was another chapter that I opened earlier that has to do with mental health, and I also have another chapter ending that chapter as well. Since I did the first taping of this interview, I have been in Cairo for a meeting of the World Congress for Mental Health which was sponsored by the World Federation for Mental Health in cooperation with the Egyptian Association for Mental Health and the World Islamic Association for Mental Health. Also present were Lee Dane and her people from the Institute for Victims of Terrorism, who made perhaps one of the finest presentations that was made in the whole conference. It was very well attended.

At the five-day conference, there were about forty countries represented, both Third World as well as European, and of course the United States. Mrs. (Jimmy) Carter was the keynote speaker. With her interest in mental health that goes way back a long, long time, she was familiar not only with the people who were there, but with the topic, and gave a very fine presentation, telling a great deal about what she and President Carter are doing at the Carter Center in Georgia.

I chaired one panel and made a very brief speech in which I made the point that we as a world congress needed particularly to keep in mind the need for mental health programs for people who were living in countries other than their own, where they were experiencing inter-cultural relations and therefore needed some guidance and support.

Mrs. Carter was interested enough to go out to the Community Services Association, the mental health program I mentioned before, and actually wrote a letter of endorsement which will be used for a fund-raising drive. I'm sure that will help tremendously in keeping the program going.

The new program director for CSA saved the day not only for us but for two other Conference groups who wanted to show some video tapes. The TV at the Hotel Marriott was not compatible with any of the video machines we had. The CSA program director brought in a Sony, vintage about 1975, good, heavy and sturdy, and the video player as well, so that we were able to show two of the films produced by the State Department on stress and on coping with violence. They also showed the one on children, "Are You OK?". All in all, the American contribution was pretty sizeable, and certainly Mrs. Carter was very supportive.

Because Mrs. Carter was there, Mrs. Sadat hosted a luncheon for her which I attended. That was a real high point because, although I had seen Mrs. Sadat recently, I had never had a chance to chat with her. Of course, Mrs. Mubarak invited Mrs. Carter and me for tea, so I had the opportunity to find out what she, as First Lady, is doing for her country. Being First Lady after Mrs. Sadat was a hard act to follow. Mrs. Mubarak recognized that she needed to play a more behind-the-scenes role than Mrs. Sadat had, with the result that when today you ask Egyptians what Mrs. Mubarak does, they reply, "Nothing, as far as we can tell."

In reality, she has a group of women, of many women, who work with over thirty-five government schools, setting up libraries and reading programs in the poorest areas of the city. They also sponsor an extracurricular sports program for girls and boys, separate, of course, and every year they have a great day of festivities and sports contests among all of the schools. Mrs. Mubarak is very interested in education. She's particularly anxious to have more pre-school education and reading readiness, the kind of Head Start program we have here.

Q: Had that been started already? Was that interest hers?

ATHERTON: She started it all. Her interest was always there. She, as an educator, has always cared about children's education. In a country the size of Egypt, with over 60% of its population under fifteen years of age, she believes education must be a priority, and she certainly is a driving force to make that happen. She has helped establish an Arab council for education. I'm not sure exactly what they're calling it, but it is not a government program. It's people-to-people. It includes Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Tunisia and Sudan. Her feeling is that with each country having some kind of expertise, there must be ways these countries-not the governments, but the people-can cooperate to improve the general education of children in that part of the world. It's very admirable. The headquarters is in Cairo, so it's another bond to bring together these countries and Egypt.

Q: And the women of the Arab world.

ATHERTON: And the women of the Arab world. They are the ones who are taking the lead in education. Yes, indeed.

When I met Roy, he was working on his master's degree at Harvard. I envisioned a wonderful life living in a university town where he would be a professor of European history, and with my background in speech and drama, I was continuing, with a little variation, my earlier dream of being a drama or a speech teacher, and so the children would go to whatever the university school was. My plans for my life were all set out until he came home one day and said he had taken the exam for the Foreign Service. At first I had to ask him what the Foreign Service was. After we'd clarified that, I dismissed it from my thoughts. At that time I was teaching drama at the Girls' Latin School in Boston and also doing some private coaching of amateur plays.

In January we received word that Roy had passed the Foreign Service written examination, and he was to go for an oral interview in Washington in April. He went, called me up to say that he had passed, and that he would be sworn into the Foreign Service, probably in July. We lived in limbo for a few months. The only thing that for me was certain was that I was pregnant. I knew what lay ahead in the immediate future. Our daughter Lynne, my daughter from my first marriage, (I was widowed during World War II), and whom Roy had adopted, was looking forward to living in exotic places that she really didn't know a thing about at age three-and-a-half.

In July, Roy and I went to Washington, with the baby tucked inside me. This was my first encounter with the fact that it was Roy who had been hired for the Foreign Service, and that as far as the State Department was concerned, I did not exist. (It was) kind of a shock, since I felt pretty portly and very much alive. But it seemed that there were no courses that I could take at the Foreign Service Institute. I could not attend any of the lectures because they might have classified material. The doors were rather effectively closed to me except for one afternoon of an hour-and-a-half when there was a questionable lecture given to us on protocol. I learned when to wear white gloves, when to wear hats, which corner of the calling card I should turn down when calling yourself, as compared to which corner I should turn down when I sent the card via a chauffeur, what making calls was all about and why it was important, and the final advice, "And, my dear, if you're fortunate enough to serve in a country that was formerly a British colony, there will always be the British club you can turn to to completely forget the natives." The Foreign Service has come a long way from that.

But at that time-or just to finish up getting us to our first post-the end of July I decided I really should check in with the doctor because I was feeling bigger than I thought I ought to be feeling. The doctor asked me exactly where I planned to have the baby. I said in Massachusetts. And he said, "Then you'd better get on the train tonight." I delayed for three days, but I delivered our son Michael within twelve hours of getting to Boston, back to my parents' home.

So we were in the Foreign Service, and we went off to Stuttgart. Roy had had German in college; it was his second language. Mine had been French, but it was good old college French which was of little value, especially in Germany. There we were in the Foreign Service; no preparation, no education allowance, no medical allowances. The Consul General and his wife, who were on the ship with us, were returning to Stuttgart from their first paid home leave after twenty-eight years in the Foreign Service. I knew little about Germany except that that's where my first husband had been killed in the war. It was 1947; it was the postwar period. It was a very, very traumatic experience all around.

When I think now of what's being done in the way of preparation for going to post, I can see that in the intervening years some people have worked very hard to make sure that this kind of vacuum doesn't continue, that one can be more aware and effective from day one. At any rate, I survived, obviously.

After three years in the Foreign Service, I suggested to Roy that he might like to think of another career because I didn't like this one at all. I had managed to keep him in the lowest ten percent of his class those three years because I was totally unable to adjust to Foreign Service life. I saw no reason why I should make calls on anybody when I had small children at home and nobody to take care of them that I felt could really be responsible for them. I had a hard time with white gloves; they got dirty so fast. The whole concept of entertaining was foreign to me because in our home we never entertained anyone except family, except one time when we entertained the top man in the Boy Scouts because my father was a Boy Scout executive. My mother wrung her handkerchief practically to shreds by the time the evening was over, she was so nervous. The Foreign Service was a very different lifestyle for me, indeed.

After two-and-a-half years, we were transferred to a less formal post. I began to realize that Foreign Service people were not the same the world over.

Q: Where was that?

ATHERTON: We went to Bonn, and were there in time for the reestablishment of the German government, a very, very exciting time to be there. Roy worked with the Tripartite Commission-the French, the British and the Americans-helping the Germans reestablish their treaties with other countries, and reestablishing their Foreign Service. That was a good post.

When we were in Bonn, we were a very, very small civilian community. Eventually, the U.S. Army, (Military Government was still in charge), decided that maybe they did need to set up a school for us. At first, we put Lynne in the German school in Bad Godesberg, but that didn't work out too well. She was fairly happy, but we were concerned she was learning only in German, and not receiving an American education. We just weren't sure that was wise. Michael went to a German kindergarten. He learned to speak German, and could say "No" in two dialects and also in High German. He didn't yet have "Yes" in his vocabulary.

Q: Were all the American children in American schools?

ATHERTON: Most of the Americans in Bonn did not have school-age children. I taught one term at the American pre-kindergarten (nursery school) when the current teacher, who was pregnant, decided to leave. I, being pregnant again, thought I'd do well to take the job because I would have to sit down on the floor and stretch and exercise and run around. So, my first teaching experience overseas was in this little pre-kindergarten, until our son Reed was born.

I had always wanted to be a teacher, and I had always been involved with young people, so I enjoyed that. As the years went on in the Foreign Service, I really became a teacher, not exactly by default, certainly not from training, but from experience.

Q: Was this the school that the Defense Department had established?

ATHERTON: The pre-kindergarten had been started by the American parents. Daughter Lynne went to the Defense Department elementary school, along with eight or ten students. The teacher was not overly qualified; in fact, she wasn't qualified. After I saw the word "allegiance" spelled incorrectly in the Pledge of Allegiance on the blackboard, I took Lynne out of the school and taught her through the Calvert course.

I must say that this instruction course was the most valuable teacher training I ever had. Of course, the lesson plans were thoroughly laid out, with just exactly what to do, based on a very sound teaching methodology. For one year I taught Lynne and a young boy whose parents were equally distressed with the other school, using the Calvert fourth grade course.

That set my career path. From Bonn we went to Damascus, where there were eleven American children of elementary school age. Their parents were just in the process of starting a school. Now you have to keep in mind that this time we didn't have any military support. The Embassy did give us an apartment, but we had to find our teachers from within our community, and among the Syrians. We had to work up our own curriculum and get our supplies all by ourselves. There was no educational allowance except for the American military personnel. So I taught because I wanted to and to pay the children's tuition fees.

We had three classrooms, with two grades to a classroom. It was a good test of the Calvert Course, adapting it to a group teaching situation. I taught there the three years we were in Damascus. One year I was also principal when the marvelous British woman, whom we thought would be there forever and ever, and had asked to be our principal, suddenly up and left and went to Libya with her husband. We were high and dry without a principal. Being principal meant that I often had Michael, grade one, in my classroom, grades five and six, for disciplining more often than I would have chosen, since he was not particularly interested in school or studying or sitting still, and his Syrian teacher was unable to cope with him.

Then we went to Aleppo where I didn't teach. It was a small consulate, and Roy had just reopened it. It had been closed due to budget constraints during the Depression. This was early '57.

The summer of '58, the Iraq revolution occurred simultaneously, or coincidentally, with the Marines' landing in Beirut. We found ourselves in Aleppo between these two situations when the Syrian government put out the word to all of its people that keeping away from foreigners was the best way to stay alive and healthy. We were left high and dry and ostracized. Roy's mother, who lived with us, and I decided to enroll for summer school at Aleppo College. She took typing and I took shorthand. Since I was not teaching, I became a student instead.

When we returned to the States the winter of '58, I taught at Potomac School, a private school in Langley, Virginia for two years. I had applied to teach in Montgomery County where we lived, but they wanted me to go back to school and take all kinds of education courses. The private school had no such requirements and actually gave me much more scope, albeit less money. It was the kind of teaching I like to do anyway, with small classes, and I enjoyed that very, very much.

I also tutored. I worked with a woman who was interested in remedial reading, and I suppose that was the beginning of my involvement with children who were having learning problems of one kind or another.

Q: Was this woman at the school?

ATHERTON: No, this was Harriet Sushan, who had set up her own tutoring program and lived not too far from us. She gave me some training and assigned children to me.

We had a wonderful sabbatical year in California while Roy studied economics at the University of California at Berkeley. I applied as a tutor at the private school where we had enrolled Michael.

I also tutored children who were hospitalized because of accidents or illness and needed a person who could teach them at their bedside. Once again, I was doing specialized and individualized teaching.

In Calcutta, our next post, I headed up the English language program at the Indo-American Society. USIA was going through one of its budget cuts at that time and decided one of the things it could really curtail was its English teaching program, especially since the British were doing such a good job of it. There were those of us, however, who thought that American English had a place in India, and persuaded the Indo-American Society to sponsor this. USIA, at that point, provided some funding. So we had an English language program for Indians who lived in Calcutta, but had come from other Indian states. This means that we were dealing with many different dialects and even languages. This was my introduction to teaching English as a second language. It required much reading and studying on my part because this was something that I had really not done before.

Q: Did you ever take the course that FSI offers? (Teaching English as a Second Language)

ATHERTON: You know, I didn't. That course did not begin until the early '70's. By the time I might have taken it, I felt that I had had enough experience and self-teaching to not really need it.

I said I had never taught English as a second language before. That's not quite accurate. In Stuttgart there was a large American military post. They had German telephone operators. The German telephone operators had a terrible time understanding GI English, soldiers' English. A friend of mine suggested, "You know, there's no way that these GI's will learn German. Why don't you and I teach the German telephone operators GI English?" We set up a program and went down to the telephone company two or three nights a week. We taught the telephone operators GI English-how to say 'Vaygen' instead of 'Feingen', and 'Bad Canshtadt' instead of 'Bad Kanstaadt', and other words the way the GI's pronounced them.

We got to know these young women, the telephone operators, and in return they gave us the most wonderful Christmas party the second Christmas we were there. In post-war Germany, 1948, there was still nothing to buy. The women exchanged handmade presents and prepared all the food-fairly heavy and starchy, but very good. So I did teach English before, but in a rather unique way, using a very specialized and limited vocabulary.

From Calcutta we returned to the States, where I taught at National Cathedral School for nine years; fourth grade for seven years, and I team-taught a program for juniors and seniors on early childhood education and development for two years. The first field trip for the juniors and seniors was to Sibley Hospital to see the neonates, and observe the tests they do that determine the developmental stages of the babies. The students were then exposed to other educational programs in the District (of Columbia). Field trips were the big thing. The students observed all the different levels of learning, from nursery schools to day-care centers to kindergartens, public and private, right through eighth grade.

By the time we got to Cairo, our last post, the teaching bug was still biting. Oh, I forgot the Lab School. The last four years that I taught in Washington were at the Kingsbury Lab School, where I taught junior-high-age students who had severe learning disabilities. Their performance levels in math, which is what I was teaching, was anywhere from first to fourth grade level. I devised a math-through-cooking program with a kitchen in my classroom, and did all the math through cooking, except, of course, the worksheets I prepared for their homework and which had to be completed and correct before they could go into the kitchen for the cooking part of the program.

Then off we went to Cairo, where I was involved with two education-specific projects. One was working with four of the Egyptian English-language schools which had begun special sections for mentally-retarded children. I helped the principals and teachers develop appropriate curricula for these children. The other project was teaching a summer studies skills course for two summers at the Cairo American College for American as well as other nationalities who felt that they simply had missed out on something very specific in their education, like geography, latitude and longitude, how to make an outline, or spelling rules. Eight teachers worked with me. Each student would work out a study plan for a week, covering specifically what that child wanted to learn during that week. Of course, we guided them to include the gaps we perceived. That was very satisfying, for both students and teachers.

The only other thing that I did in the education line while in Cairo, was tutoring an eleven-year-old boy who had great difficulty reading and writing. I worked with him in an intensive six-week program. He then joined the special education program at Cairo American College and made the honor roll every year from 9th grade until he graduated.

Q: You must have felt very proud of that for both of you.

ATHERTON: I did. I only wish I could have been there for the graduation, but it was after we left. I missed that.

It seems a golden opportunity to set to rest the many, many rumors that persisted about my office in the Embassy in Cairo. When we arrived in Cairo, it didn't take long to realize that (1) the Residence was anywhere from a ten- to thirty-minute drive away from the Embassy, and that (2) in 1979 the telephone service was abysmal. One could perhaps get through to someone, have one second of conversation, and then be cut off. Since Roy and I have always worked closely together, we were both frustrated after one week of trying unsuccessfully to get in touch with each other during the day. One night I said, "You know, the only way you and I can work together effectively is if I'm at the Embassy or you are here at home." Roy replied, "Well, I can't stay home, but I'm not going to have a staff aide, and the small office reserved for the staff aide is empty. Why don't you use it? It's already equipped with a telephone and typewriter." That became my office. Twice a week I spent an hour or two of the morning briefing the household staff on upcoming events they would have responsibility for at the Residence. The balance of my days I spent at the office or somewhere in Cairo, visiting people, going to meetings in Maadi at the Community Services Association, at the various Egyptian schools I mentioned earlier, or attending meetings of American and Egyptian organizations.

In brief, I had an office at the Embassy, an otherwise unused office. I did my own secretarial work; I answered my own telephone. One of the advantages in this arrangement was Roy's and my lunchtime routine. Instead of our spending the early part of the evenings or the very late part of the afternoons at the Residence going over invitations, mail, etc., we did all that at lunch. In a small refrigerator I kept the makings for salad and sandwiches so I could prepare a simple lunch to eat while going over the calendars and reading mail.

I mentioned the telephone. To my surprise, that number became the embassy twenty-four-hour hotline when President Sadat was assassinated in October 1981. Rumors were rampant, of course, Embassy personnel manned the phone after hours for about two weeks. During the day I answered the phone and passed the caller on to the appropriate embassy officer for responses. Such a communication channel helped to disburse many fears and concerns.

During that same period, and for a few weeks longer, I went to Community Services Association in Maadi for an hour or more each day to be available to anyone in the community who needed to be reassured or just wanted to talk about the recent tragedy. Keeping the lines of communication open were very important during that crisis.

Q: You were the Hotline?

ATHERTON: I didn't know that. I only knew that first day that my phone was ringing off the hook! As I had often done on weekends when we'd been at the Embassy and I referred the phone call to whoever seemed the most likely person to answer it. Eventually, I realized what had happened-yes, my number was the hotline.

I never at any time attempted to answer any questions. All I said was, "I will pass on the information or I will try to find the person." I was a referral service. It was good in that finally there was someone else there in the office to of course take the calls. But at least the first day that everybody knew that it was going to happen, there was someone on the other end when they called. We did this for about a week. I should add that in that same period of time-that same week after the assassination-I went out to Maadi every day and spent one or two hours at the Community Services Association for anyone who wanted to drop in and talk about the crisis, about the assassination, about what was happening with the government, what was happening in the country, trying to allay whatever the fears were.

Q: When did the Community Services Association start?

ATHERTON: The Community Services Association was established in September 1980, but I had the office in the Embassy by July of 1979 when we got there. The majority of the American community lived in Maadi, and although the phones worked fairly well within the city, they still were a little shaky from Maadi to Cairo. Roy and I decided that if I just went out to Maadi and listened to people, which was the main need, and allay any concerns, that would be more helpful than almost anything I could do. I also went over to the school, Cairo American College, and talked with children and the teachers there.

Q: Did the CSA have a significant role to play during this post-assassination period when there must have been a lot of turmoil?

ATHERTON: Yes. The main thing that it did was to let people know that they could come over to the CSA and talk about whatever was bothering them, concerning them; that I would be there for a couple of hours each day if they wanted to come and talk with me. I would tell them whatever I knew. So CSA certainly played the role of a place where people who were jittery and nervous could go.

Of course, from that event, Gale and Joel, the program directors, developed programs dealing with stress to a much greater extent than they had before. They had seminars for adults, and they improved and increased their programs with the children about what to do during a time of crisis. Out of the sadness and the tragedy came a recognition that we all need to be prepared for times like this.

Q: This was a real test for CSA in crisis management.

ATHERTON: Exactly. There were other tests, too. I suppose the first time that the British really recognized the need for the kinds of programs CSA had besides continuing education, which they supported, was when several British families were on the Sinai Peninsula in '83. The children went down to play on the beach and an unexploded mine went off. The parents witnessed the deaths of all their children. When they returned to Cairo, one of the British compatriots suggested they go and talk with Gale and Joel. Gale and Joel established a support program for them and for the whole community because, of course, everyone was affected.

Q: It was fortunate that they were there.

ATHERTON: It was. The stiff upper lip goes only so far, and when you have a tragedy like that and there's no support system in place, it's even more traumatic.

Q: And then later on there was the Achille Lauro episode.

ATHERTON: Yes, and the burning of the hotels in Cairo. At the time that the guards burned the hotels in Giza, they also rallied in Maadi, and the Army helicopters circled the school. All the roads were blocked so the children who were in school could not leave, nor could their parents get to them. Many of the parents went to Gale and Joel, who called the school to find out exactly what was happening, and were able to get the word around that the children were all safe. The helicopters were simply hovering over the school since the guards' camp was nearby. The parents were asked to stay calm, and when it was quiet enough, they could come and get their children. Once again, the network worked.

Q: Was the protection effort by the helicopters spontaneous, or rather initiated on the part of the government?

ATHERTON: I don't know, but certainly they were making sure the area was well protected. I guess it had to be the government.

Since the Israeli Ambassador lived in Maadi, there were always guards around that residence. Another tragic incident occurred when one of the Israeli Embassy officials was killed on the street in Maadi. The people in Cairo really had cause to worry, to have fears, not that any of the actions were against them, but simply with that kind of terrorism, it's frightening.

Let's see, I was going to talk about something else. When we arrived in Cairo in 1979, as I said before, it was the honeymoon time for Americans, Egyptians and Israelis. One of the benefits of the Peace Treaty was a program called the Peace Fellowships. By Congressional legislation, some ten-thousand Egyptian post-degree students were to come on scholarships, or fellowships, to the United States for one or two years of study. The program was administered by AID; the logistics the responsibility of USIA.

We arrived just when the first group of Peace Fellows had been chosen. We bade them goodbye when they went off to the States, and, of course, welcomed them on their return. As part of the two-day orientation for each of the Peace Fellowship groups, I was asked to talk with them about the United States, since many of them were going there for the first time. I developed a talk I titled "America, the Way It Really Is." I just talked about very simple things such as how to know where to retrieve their luggage on arrival in the U.S. I also reminded them no matter what they were doing before receiving their fellowship, they were going to be students in America, living a student life. I assured them they were not going to be living in luxury, but rather, they should plan on sharing an apartment or living on campus if possible. They could manage on their fellowships so long as they didn't buy a car, but rather walked or biked. They should buy their food at cooperatives and prepare their own meals. This was all very basic advice.

I also described a possible embarrassing experience: discovering they were in the wrong cafeteria line, one solution being to acknowledge the mistake, step out of line and locate the correct one, recognizing that other people had been known to make the same mistake, that it was all right to make a mistake.

I cautioned them that many times when they might ask for directions of someone, that person might be as much of a stranger as they. My purpose was to try to give the students a feeling of confidence.

The theme I emphasized was, "Ask if you don't know. Just ask. Don't be embarrassed." It is difficult for Egyptians, as it is for all of us, to ask, to admit to not knowing something. I urged them, particularly in their classes, to ask for clarification if they didn't understand something. It was better to ask and find out than remain confused.

After each talk there was a question and answer period, a chance for the students to discuss their concerns. I followed this pattern with each talk, about eight or ten times a year, for three years. It gave me a chance to meet young people who were going to the U.S., observe their English proficiency, and, hopefully give them suggestions on how best to manage their time and themselves in another culture.

Q: Was there an English language requirement?

ATHERTON: There was, but the expectation was they would get the final polishing of their English in the United States at the universities, which I think was a big mistake. Subsequently, and this was after we left, an English language program was begun in Cairo, following the curriculum of the one in Alexandria.

Q: Was it part of their departure orientation?

ATHERTON: No, but they could sign up for the classes several months before departing for the U.S. This English language program has expanded in recent years. It has always been my belief that one way to understand the United States and its culture is through English language programs. To just learn the language is not enough; it must be through people for whom it's a native language. Then the culture of the country is incorporated into the language learning.

Q: Were these students going to universities across the country?

ATHERTON: All around the country. AMIDEAST, a foundation headquartered in Washington, with offices in Egypt, provided the logistics and counseling support for the program.

Q: Would those going to Texas learn Texlish?

ATHERTON: Could be! Mary Louise, on a completely different subject, but that is dear to me, I'd like to talk about the role the American Association of Foreign Service Women (AAFSW) has played in the improvement of the life of the Foreign Service.

In the late sixties, early seventies, AAFSW established the Forum which met Saturday mornings at the Guy Mason Recreational Center in upper Georgetown. Groups of Foreign Service spouses, with a serious interest in improving the quality of Foreign Service life, addressed various areas of concern, such as better education for children overseas, greater employment opportunities for spouses when overseas, and the possible steps the State Department and the Foreign Service could take to address these concerns.

From these large meetings emerged smaller groups who met to discuss more intensively the topics I have already mentioned, and from these came the Forum Report. The Report, in turn, led to the creation of the Family Liaison Office (FLO). As you and I know, such major advances were only possible because of the interest and support of Secretary of State and Mrs. Vance.

Prior to this time, AAFSW's major contribution had been the Book Fair, a tremendous enterprise, which raised thousands of dollars yearly for a scholarship program for Foreign Service children. With the Forum Report and its implementation, AAFSW came into its own as an advocate for the Foreign Service families. Important contributions included, in addition to the Family Liaison Office, establishment of AAFSW as a registered lobbying group, thus providing effective access to the Congress, the review and improvement of the entire evacuation processes, the founding of a Skills Bank for spouses, expansion of the education advisory office, three support groups, one for Foreign Service children, one for Foreign-born spouses and one for divorced spouses.

Q: This was the new agenda, really, for the Foreign Service women.

ATHERTON: Totally new. I was most familiar with the group that met Saturday mornings for several months, addressing the need for job opportunities overseas for spouses. Our convener, or chairman, was a young Foreign Service spouse who, after one or two postings abroad as a spouse, took and passed the Foreign Service exam upon return to Washington. She (Stephanie Kinney) was working in the Director General's office after completing the A-100 course at the Foreign Service Institute. While not all of us were cut out to follow her example, she was an inspiration to us; she helped us address our concerns as working women and she helped us formulate plans to solve our dilemmas. The Skills Bank was a direct result of our recommendations.

Q: She was there at the right time. So were you.

ATHERTON: Just the right time. So my hat is off to AAFSW. I had produced, too, improvement of the whole emergency evacuation program. It has persuaded State Department Management, which implemented it, and, equally important, most of Management now recognizes that families go with employees and are a very vital part of the Foreign Service.

Q: The Forum group and the work since that original committee created this awareness in the Department and Management, catalyzed a lot of action which is now more or less taken for granted.

ATHERTON: We can only hope that the Family Liaison Office and Community Liaison officers will survive the Gramm-Rudman budget cuts. I guess our prayer is that, even if there must be cutbacks, enough remains so that we can build up again, because if cut off completely, we have to start from scratch, and that would take another twenty-five years. I think, however, the State Department management will be wise about that.

I was talking with the Director General today, and he said, "Don't worry about FLO and CLO. It'll be there." I'm assuming he knows what he talks about. I have great faith in George Vest.

Perhaps this is the appropriate time to mention the Iran Evacuee Support Network Program. Its greatest accomplishment, albeit serendipitous, was, perhaps, the physical expansion of FLO.

When families were evacuated from Iran in December of '78, it was assumed, as it had been apparently in most previous evacuations, that eventually they would return to post. By January '79, it was obvious, as it apparently had been in most previous evacuations, they would not return to post. On the contrary, by then and definitively so by February, it was clear that not only would there be no return to post for families, but most of the official staff would be evacuated.

While it was true that, as one of the officers on the Iran Desk in the Department put it, the families were out and safe, so why be concerned? I was. With verbal permission from the Iran Desk, a group of us set up the Iran Evacuee Support Network Program. Our first task was finding office space and equipment.

FLO, at that time, had a small reception area and two small offices. Next to it were two vacant offices and a large cloakroom area. These were used twice a year for conferences. Once again, with verbal permission, reluctantly given by the Department's Administration Office, we moved into the empty offices and the cloakroom, with the understanding we would vacate the premises long before the conference time, scheduled for October.

The Bureau of Near East and South Asian Affairs gave us desks, chairs, typewriters and even a telephone with an answering service. We were in business. For the next several months, we contacted the families who had been evacuated to determine what we might do for them and soon discovered the immediate need was helping them get in touch with each other. They felt disoriented, lost. They had been so abruptly uprooted, so cut off from husbands and fathers who had remained in Iran, so helpless, and so totally out of contact with all that had been a part of their lives. Some were still full of anger and resentment. Some had tried to get their household things out of storage so they could settle back in their homes or rent an apartment, only to learn that without power of attorney from the employee, they could not have access to their own things. The separation allowance proved inadequate, particularly for those women who, without power of attorney, could not even collect their husbands' paychecks. We were overwhelmed with the myriad of problems the evacuees were facing.

FLO was in no position to assist even though it wanted to. The office was less than a year old and was already inundated itself with family problems and concerns unrelated to evacuations.

Our Program volunteers became an advocacy group for the evacuee families. We visited the appropriate offices in the State Department to determine what could be done to cut the red tape and provide access to household goods, money allotments, etc. Our early efforts went into trying to meet crucial needs. Just alerting the Department to where the system was proving cumbersome and unresponsive brought results. The Under Secretary for Management, Ben Read, supported us fully, thus signaling to others the urgency to solve the myriad problems.

All the top management was cooperative. Perhaps one of the most painful yet productive steps we took was arranging an afternoon meeting of the evacuees in the Washington vicinity with the top management people. It provided a forum for venting concerns and for everyone to become aware of the others' problems-both the problems facing the evacuees and those facing Management. It was, I believe, the first time evacuees and Management had ever met together. While obviously all the problems were not solved, there was, at least, the beginning of a building of trust and understanding between them.

This event and subsequent discussions led inevitably to our examination of the entire evacuation system, to see if there were ways to improve it. We prepared a lengthy paper with recommendations for changes in that system and presented it to Mr. Read. Among the points we made, based on information we obtained on previous evacuations, were (1), people rarely return to post after an evacuation caused by civil or man-made disturbances; (2), the best safehaven worldwide is the United States; (3), preparation for evacuations should be made long before the event, i.e., powers of attorney are essential, there must be an effective way for the evacuees to have access to their storage items; and (4), the separation allowance implies a household already in place and is adequate for evacuees.

As a result of our recommendations, the State Department made a thorough study of the evacuation procedures and revised them, making them more relevant and effective.

Other benefits derived from the Iran Evacuee Support Network Program included the establishment of another position in FLO with responsibility for working with the Department on evacuations; the helpful "What Do I Do Now?" booklet and subsequent workshops to disseminate the valuable information it contained; and, what I find amusing as well as satisfying, FLO now has permanent offices in all the space we had acquired for a supposedly brief time.

If anyone had asked me ten years ago who Una Chapman Cox was, I would have said I haven't a clue. In subsequent years I have learned a great deal, and I'm very grateful to Una Chapman Cox. Most, no, all Foreign Service people should be as well. She was a very wealthy Texan woman, owning land and oil and timber, who was traveling around the world by ship just after the Second World War. When she disembarked in Bombay, she, for one reason or another, neglected to take her passport with her. She was picked up by the police in Bombay and put in jail.

An as yet unidentified vice consul from the consulate in Bombay went to see her and took her some fruit and food, befriended her and got her released from jail and back to her boat in time to sail. She was so eternally grateful that-and now we are talking thirty years later-she asked a Foreign Service officer whom she knew from her home town of Corpus Christi, if there was anything she could do to repay the Foreign Service for what this young man had done for her in Bombay. He said, "Well, why don't you establish a foundation for the Foreign Service, and why don't you do it while you are alive because that way you say exactly what you want it to be for?" She established the Una Chapman Cox Foundation, the sole purpose of which is to further and strengthen the Foreign Service.

The trustees of the foundation are Harvie Branscomb, Jr., who was her lawyer and confidante, her niece Jane, and the third a Foreign Service officer. The first Foreign Service officer was Pete Vaky, also a resident of Corpus Christi, and the second one was Roy, when he left the Foreign Service. The third is Diego Asencio. There is also a Council of Advisors. Roy is now the chairman.

The whole purpose of the foundation is to do whatever it can to be of assistance to the Foreign Service, and while money is not yet as great an amount as it will be when the estate is finally settled, it has, nevertheless, sent a Foreign Service couple to the Aspen Institute, among other programs. It created a series of scholarships for sabbatical leaves for Foreign Service officers. It's done its best to try to improve the Speakers Bureau in the State Department so that the State Department is more of an advocate for itself.

I just attended a luncheon that George Vest, the Director General, gave today for the foundation trustees. The occasion was the annual meeting of the trustees. It was also the first presentation of the Walt Stoessel Award, presented by Walt's widow Mary Ann, to Ron Spiers, Under Secretary for Management.

As we sat around the table having lunch, all the talk was, of course, about the Foreign Service. One person remarked that we have been through crises before. That began a whole series of reminiscences. We talked about the McCarthy period, the budget crunch right now, the Depression, and that budget crunch when so many legations around the world were closed.

We also agreed, however, that the Foreign Service is strong enough to survive and will survive, and that unlike the McCarthy era when everyone ran scared and became almost schizophrenic, perhaps the one good thing that would come out of this current crisis is the recognition that we must be our own advocate.

We must have an office up on Capitol Hill. We must have our Congressional liaison people up there. We need to provide more services for our Congressmen, such as easier access to passports and visa issuance. We need to get to know our Congressmen better. We need to see CODELs (Congressional delegations) as very positive and necessary, that if we don't sell ourselves, then Congress will sell us short. We must speak up for ourselves. Then we can have the kind of Foreign Service to be proud of.

Q: Is Cox (Foundation) going to have any role to play in that?

ATHERTON: Actually, the encouragement included a suggestion that the foundation write a letter to the Secretary of State recommending the office on Capitol Hill similar to the kinds of offices which other departments have, and with that kind of push, Management in the Department can support it and make it happen.

I was thinking that for AAFSW, with all of the lobbying it does, how convenient it would be to have that office to make phone calls, and to wait there for appointments with Congressmen. It would be much more effective.

Q: It will add a lot of clout to AAFSW's efforts up there.

ATHERTON: Indeed it will. I don't know how long it will take to happen, but it was really a very optimistic lunch, and I think that the Una Chapman Cox Foundation has made a tremendous contribution. On a bad day that is good news.

Q: This is Mary Louise Weiss, May 9, 1989, doing a continuing interview with Betty Atherton at her home in Washington, D.C.

I know that you set up an office in the State Department, in the FLO office for the evacuees that had come out of the Middle East, and I was wondering what made you do that. Had you ever been evacuated yourself?

ATHERTON: No, but I had almost been evacuated, and I think that probably that made me interested in exactly what happens when you are. Let me just read the first paragraph of one of the documents I have here that I just came across recently in looking for what would be relevant to talk about on this (subject). This was written in '79 when I was justifying or, at least in my own mind, trying to determine why I had become so interested in trying to help the evacuees who had come out of Iran. This is a quotation that is just the first paragraph.

"It has been almost twenty-one years since the Suez Crisis in the summer of 1956. At the time we were on home leave from Damascus, Syria, with transfer orders to Aleppo, Syria, where Roy had been designated to open the consulate. Not long after our departure all the families had been evacuated from Damascus to Beirut. In August we learned that only Roy and our fourteen-year old daughter Lynne had been issued travel orders to the Middle East; Roy to Aleppo, and Lynne to Beirut where she was already enrolled in the American Community School. Our two sons, Michael and Reed, and I were to remain in the States until further notice. I not so jokingly referred to ourselves as 'Dulles hostages'. We would receive during this period \$200 as a Separate Maintenance Allowance (SMA). I puzzled over the term Separate Maintenance Allowance. Separate we certainly were from Roy and Lynne, but separate maintenance on \$200 a month, even in 1956 was impossible."

It just goes on to talk about how we coped living with my parents, and that was kind of a strain on everybody. But then I got to thinking about what would have happened if we had been evacuated to Beirut, and that was when I learned that while I was barely surviving on some substitute teaching on \$200 a month, my friends with the same size family in Beirut were getting \$750 a month. And it cost a lot less to live in Beirut than it did in the United States, and furthermore, they got some very nice accommodations, and they were very independent, and they were very near when it came time to go back to Syria. So all in all, I suppose the awareness came from my feeling of a tremendous amount of inequity between having had the misfortune of being on home leave, and therefore not evacuated, as opposed to a nice evacuation to Beirut. So that was what started it.

Q: Washington was not considered a safehaven for you...

ATHERTON: No, it wasn't. The safehavens, as you can tell from the people from Syria and from Amman, Jordan, they went for their safehaven to Beirut. At one time the safe-haven for Jordan was Iran, Tehran. As we worked with the evacuees and got to thinking about this whole evacuation process, and doing some history on previous evacuations, we came up with the fact that the only safehaven, really, was back in the States, because it became very clear that unless it had been, let's say, an act of God like a hurricane, or a tornado, or a flood or an earthquake, the likelihood of returning to your post once you have been evacuated, was very, very slim.

What happened is that you stay at the safehaven for a while, and eventually there would be a transfer, and then you would come back to the States, and you would do a transfer, or you would do a direct transfer (from post to post). Later on we will talk about one of the recommendations that was exactly that-that this would become the safehaven, the United States. Where you live in the States would become the safehaven.

Q: Didn't that happen in the big evacuation from the Middle East, when for the first time all these groups were coming out of our embassies in the Middle East to Washington as the designated safehaven?

ATHERTON: Exactly. I'm not sure to Washington.

Q: I mean to the United States.

ATHERTON: That's right-to wherever they are from. And, if I'm not mistaken, this was the evacuation that occurred in the Middle East because of the attempt to blow up the mosque in Saudi Arabia.

Q: In Jeddah.

ATHERTON: Indeed, people did return to the United States.

Q: And the burning of the Embassy in Pakistan (Islamabad).

ATHERTON: In Pakistan as well. And subsequently, in all evacuations the safehaven has been back in the United States. I should add, too, (that since) today 30% of our spouses are foreign-born spouses, if they choose to go to the country they consider their home, that is allowed as well. Most of these spouses are from countries that they don't want to go back to, particularly in Asia, but that option is certainly there.

Q: You had had this experience, and now all these great numbers of families were coming out of the Middle East. You had done some background work, and then what happened?

ATHERTON: Another little document I came across, just a two-page one. I won't read it all, but it pretty well summarizes what we did. Let me just quote from that. "By February 6 all families of U.S. Government employees have been evacuated." That day I spoke with Henry Precht, Country Director for Iran, about setting up telephone contact with families safehavened in the United States. With his concurrence and administrative support from NEA (Near East and South Asia department), the Iran Evacuee Support Network Program was created.

The two rooms which had been vacated by the China Working Group became our headquarters. This was the working group that set up Taiwan as not an embassy but our official operating headquarters. Their proximity for this China Working Group proved ideal, as particular family hardship problems emerged. I hasten to add here that the rooms we actually used, and where the China Working Group had been, were adjacent to the Family Liaison Office. But they were the cloakrooms for the big conferences that were held twice a year in the State Department and were considered absolutely sacrosanct except for some groups, task forces, that would be there maybe a month or two months. So when we were allowed to have this area we were told, 'Now you must be out by May because that's when we have a big conference.' Well, of course anyone who's been to the FLO office today knows (that) all of that space is now part of FLO. It was never ever relinquished, so squatters' rights worked out, as it often does."

Then I go on just to talk about what we did. We were very fortunate in having Laurie Tracy, who was a member of the Iran Working Group, (the people who were up in the Operations Center), and who had formerly been the Ambassador's staff aide in Tehran. She had already begun the compilation of the names of evacuees both in the U.S. and overseas. We worked on those lists and began to draw up a list of next of kin for all personnel still in Iran. That took some doing, because it meant that we had to get permission to go to the Foreign Service Lounge and look in their files, and this was considered an invasion of the Privacy Act, so it took a very special kind of permission for us to have access to that.

We set up locator and next-of-kin cards, and then we completed our lists and began calling people. I find a note in my own handwriting here. It says, "Mary Louise Weiss, AAFSW member, compiled the lists and cards. She also prepared envelopes for mailing the lists to everyone who had been evacuated both here and abroad." So I see, Mary Louise, why we are getting all this in here.

Q: Was that set up as more or less a telephone networking to the families who were scattered across the U.S.?

ATHERTON: Precisely. Linda McCabe was another person, a family counselor who joined us, as well as several other people. We were telephoning for three reasons. First, to tell the families whatever we knew now, each step of the way about the embassy personnel who were still in Iran; to give them the Iran Working Group phone number that was up in the Operations Center, so that if they had any messages they wanted to get to their people back there, they could; and to provide a sympathetic ear. We tried to put evacuees in touch with each other because they really had no idea where anyone was. When you're at a post you don't focus on where people are from. You're just all there.

Marie Sullivan was another one. Her husband was the Ambassador in Iran at the time, and Ginny Taylor. Those two came daily and phoned families, and were in a better position than some of us, because they knew the people they were talking with. Then Margaret Sullivan came in after work each day and also called people, and very carefully identified herself as Margaret rather than Sullivan so she wouldn't be confused with Marie Sullivan, the wife of the Ambassador.

We would get information from the Iran Working Group about just what the current situation was, and any messages to relate from families. We tried to help people keep in touch, not only (with those) in this country (whom) they wanted to hear from or know about, but also with the officers that were still in Iran.

On the 17th of February the number of employees that were remaining in Iran was reduced considerably, so that there were fewer there, and of course as you know, eventually there was the actual taking of the hostages.

Q: The Hotline up on the upper floor of the State Department was more or less a counseling kind of service, was it not, for the families of the Iran hostages?

ATHERTON: The Hotline was set up later during the hostage family period. Actually, I think that this evacuation was the first time that any family members had any access to the Operations Center and were able to talk to their husbands or family members who were there (in Iran). It was before that strictly for official messages and discussions. But with this one we broke the ice, and then the Hotline came along after the hostage-taking.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about how you managed to get those rooms in the State Department for your program?

ATHERTON: Ha, ha! Let's start with the fact that I knew the rooms were there, and I knew they were empty, and they were very near the Family Liaison Office. I tried several times on the telephone to reach the person who was responsible for the assignment of the rooms. After three days of total failure, I brought a big thick book with me one morning, and I went down to the complex of offices where he was located on the first floor, and announced to the receptionist that I knew this gentleman was a very busy man, but I needed just a few moments of his time, and I brought a book, and I just would be sitting there, and whenever he had a minute I'd appreciate having a chance to talk with him.

The complex of offices were such that at the very end of the complex there was a connection, otherwise there was a corridor with rooms, so that it was like a suite of offices. I watched him dart there several times, and debated whether I would interrupt, and I decided no, I had a big book to read. It was about noon or one o'clock when they decided that he had time for me. He was very nice. I told him that Mrs. Vance (wife of the Secretary of State) had sent him her regards and appreciated all he would be doing to help us out in this time of need. We got the rooms on the promise that we would be out of them by May. This was a purely temporary arrangement.

Q: Was there some furniture in there?

ATHERTON: Yes, there were some desks and chairs, and one telephone. It was NEA, the Near East and South Asia Bureau, that furnished us with not only a telephone and typewriters and paper and everything we needed to set up the office, but also an answering service phone, so that it could be put on answering service and recording when we weren't there.

Q: You were not then an adjunct of the FLO office?

ATHERTON: Not at all. It was interesting. Poor Janet Lloyd [then the first Director of the Family Liaison Office]. This was less than a year since the Family Liaison Office had been established. I started with Janet; she was the first one I went to to say, "What are you doing to help the evacuees?" She just threw up her hands and said, 'Oh Betty, just don't ask me; I can't do it.' She was so swamped with what there was. I asked her, "Can't you get some more help? Certainly there must be some people who could just enlarge your office." She said, 'Oh, this is still on such a trial basis for so many people. I can't rock the boat in less than a year.' So we were near, but we were not part of (the FLO). We certainly had support.

Q: She supported...the FLO office supported you.

ATHERTON: Absolutely. And as you know, there's now an evacuation officer that is part of FLO. Ginny Taylor was the first one in that position.

Q: What kind of response or support, or lack of, did you have from the Management part of the State Department? They saw this developing and growing, and solving ....

ATHERTON: Yes they did. I guess I can best say that it was a case of, once again, people feeling so overwhelmed with everything else that was going on. It was best summed up by Henry Precht, who, when I asked "What are you doing for these people now that they're out?", referring to the families that had been evacuated, he said, 'They're out aren't they! What's there to worry about?' I think that was pretty much the attitude.

It wasn't until we had some real documentation of hardships, until we heard the stories of people who couldn't even get their furniture out of storage because they didn't have power of attorney, who couldn't begin to set up households anywhere else, who had all their possessions in Iran and had no money.

Q: These were growing stories, weren't they, that were coming out. Wasn't there a conference that FLO and Management sponsored?

ATHERTON: Yes. Eventually it was very clear that Management recognized there was a need to do something. And so we had a conference for all of the evacuees in the Washington area with Ben Read who was the Under Secretary for Management, Sheldon Kryszewski who was the Administrative Director for the Near East and South Asia [Bureau], Hal Saunders who was the Assistant Secretary for the Near East at the time. Everyone rallied around.

Q: Was there someone there from MED?

ATHERTON: Yes, we had representatives from MED. The various parts of the Department that actually were ones that could help to alleviate the problems were there. I think we had about, my recollection is that we had about 35 or 40 evacuees. It was a stormy session. We knew it would be. We felt the best thing was to let the evacuees just say how they felt. Then we had asked the different people from Management to talk about what had been done, what was being done, and what they planned to do. It was a very consciousness-raising exercise. Some people felt it was much too controversial. I think it was almost necessary in order to be able to move on from that to being able to effect some quicker action than we would have otherwise.

Q: The Department did respond, as time went on, and there has been a lot accomplished, thanks to you and the others. Did you have a budget, or were you simply given what you needed?

ATHERTON: It was like FLO. FLO presents a budget, but then it's sort of doled out to them. We were like that. We didn't present a budget, but whatever we needed we were given.

Q: Which was a recognition of...

ATHERTON: Actually, quite honestly, now that I think of it, Linda McCabe, who was the only real professional among us volunteers in the counseling sense, and who was the person who did the final writing of the report to Secretary Vance about evacuations, was given a PIT (Part-time/Intermittent/Temporary) position and she was paid, so that she was able to move from her outside practice to actually being able to assist us because she was being paid. So we did have one paid employee.

Q: From that beginning FLO has taken on a permanent position, have they not?

ATHERTON: Yes. In 1980-there's another one of my little documents here-February 6, 1980, a memorandum for M (Management) from Mr. Read, and it's titled "Family Evacuation Support Coordinator. Issue: How to respond to Janet Lloyd's request for establishment of a Family Evacuation Support Coordinator." It goes on to talk about a task force, or working group, to put together all the facets of the evacuation problem into coordinated focus, and so forth, and so forth. The end of it was a recommendation that the position of Family Evacuation Support Coordinator be instituted as part of the Family Liaison Office. Fortunately, they just call her the Evacuation Officer. The other is a little too wordy. That did come out of it as well as several other actions.

Q: What were some of the others?

ATHERTON: In this letter to Secretary Vance we made some recommendations, and then in turn these recommendations were actually acted upon. The first one...

Q: You made five recommendations, I believe.

ATHERTON: I am just trying to see where they are. One certainly was the one we mentioned earlier, the evacuees returning to the United States, this being the safe-haven for everybody. Another was charging the Overseas Briefing Center with the responsibility for preparing training about evacuation procedures for people who are going out to the field. Until that time no one ever talked about it. When you got to a post you had a hush-hush meeting about evacuation procedures, most of which were totally unrealistic, like driving up the autobahn from Stuttgart to Frankfurt to catch the planes that would evacuate us from Germany when the Russians invaded. Stuttgart was nearer the border than Frankfurt, and so I figured we would all be driving up together, the Russian tanks and we to Frankfurt to be evacuated, if we got there!

Another was that while we had taken responsibility for calling the families, we recommended that this was really part of the Department's responsibility. You may recall that particularly during the hostage crisis the Department was very, very good about keeping families informed of developments and in touch with them. That has continued today. That is now an official policy.

Of course money is always a worry. The Overseas Briefing Center runs a program on finances and on "What Do I Do Now?", as it's called, which talks about having power of attorney on hand at all times, so that if you are evacuated as a family member, you have the power of attorney to have the power to get your furniture out of storage and whatever else you need to do to become self-sufficient again. Also, how much the Government should pay evacuees or people who are in a temporary status. The recommendation was that there be a more realistic Separate Maintenance Allowance. That too, has been raised, although I don't know whether those who were subsequently evacuated found it adequate or not. I suppose no matter how much we have, it doesn't always seem as adequate as we would like. And the last one, and perhaps the most important one because it meant the future was assured, was that there be a network established for each evacuation situation, so that there were people within the State Department who were charged with helping and organizing just exactly what would happen in this kind of a crisis. These were all approved by Secretary Vance and were actually instituted, so that (they were in place when) there were several evacuations in the years after that. The one in Sudan, which I think was three years ago now, was determined to have been the most successful because the whole crisis management people, the support network, was in place in the Department. There was time for the planning to take (effect), and apparently as smoothly as any evacuation could go, it went. So that was a real plus.

Q: The background had been laid out for that...in great part due to you...

ATHERTON: It's interesting; it takes the right people at the right time. You have to have a kind of constellation. I certainly was a driving force; there's no question about that. Henry Precht will tell you that every day. But if you don't have the support of the people who make the decisions, you can drive as hard as you want and you won't get anywhere. Mrs. Vance and Secretary Vance were so supportive of the families of the Foreign Service that much of what was accomplished while I was being this driving force, was really because I had the full support of the Secretary and Mrs. Vance.

Q: She was very supportive, as you mentioned earlier, of the Kabul Experience.

ATHERTON: Yes. She was the one who had invited Congressional spouses to come to the presentation of "The Kabul Experience", and she was also the one who had the foresight to seize another opportunity to make a big change, trying always to have the Congressional and the Foreign Service spouses working together. We had working groups where we decided what we had in common, what was different about our lives, how we could help each other. We had large meetings where we were up on the Hill one time for a marvelous, very professional expert explanation of Mexico and all the troubles Mexico had. We also had some meetings in the State Department when the Congressional wives came there just as we had gone up to the Hill. There we talked about our differences and our similarities and how best we could support each other. This kind of working together made such a difference in how people felt about CODELs when they went out.

Q: Would you explain what a CODEL is for those who don't know?

ATHERTON: Yes. A CODEL is a Congressional Delegation. A STAFFDEL is a Staff Delegation. This is a term used on the Hill for those who visit different posts, not inspect, but go out to different posts to see what's going on, to observe whatever that country may be doing, or that Embassy may be doing.

Q: Sometimes with wives-spouses went along...

ATHERTON: Sometimes with wives. Among one of the working groups we had, it led to the production of a little very thin orange pamphlet called "The Congressional Delegation Travel Handbook." It was just tips for the Congressional wives, mostly wives, on what went and what didn't when you were visiting different posts. It was naturally not post-specific, but I think one of the parts I like best was, 'When you decide you really want to buy that big rug, just imagine that your constituents from Iowa are at Andrews Air Force Base when you return from the trip, and watch you coming off with your great big rug.' The handbook explains what the Embassy could and couldn't do for you.

Q: Who put out this little (pamphlet)?

ATHERTON: This was put out by the working group of Congressional and State Department spouses. June Bingham was the real editor of it and her daughter did all of the very clever sketches in it. I keep trying to revive the handbook but not with much luck so far.

Q: Were there any other things that Mrs. Vance became interested in, involved with, in relation to Foreign Service women?

ATHERTON: Yes. There was one where she really made a big difference. There has been for many years a seminar one-week long to start with, it's now two weeks, for the Ambassadors-designate, those who are about to go to posts. It's held in the State Department. It's a kind of show-and-tell, or used to be. But it was an opportunity for both the Career and non-career Ambassadors-designate to learn a little bit about what lay ahead for them with the duties that they would be assuming as ambassadors. Mrs. Vance had heard about these seminars, and she asked me what was done for the spouses of Ambassadors-designate. I said, "Well, they can always make an appointment and go and talk with the FLO, now that we have a FLO, and to the Overseas Briefing Center, but that's really about it." And she said, 'But isn't there anything in those seminars that the spouses would find helpful?' I said, "Yes, because it just tells you what life is like."

Not until Mrs. Vance asked the question, the only training, as I said, had been just going over and talking with people. Of course, you went over to the Foreign Buildings Office where you found out what the inventory was at the Residence, and that was really all you needed to know as the wife of an ambassador—just what paintings to choose, and what the decor of the place was, and an inventory of the crystal. Aside from that, of course, what would you expect an ambassador's spouse to do or be interested in? But Mrs. Vance thought there was more, and I tried.

I went over to the Foreign Service Institute and asked if it would be possible for the spouses of Ambassadors-designate to attend at least (part) of the seminar. I was assured that there was nothing in it that would be of interest to them. But that didn't daunt Mrs. Vance. We found an opportunity, fortuitously, to do a little bypassing, and the result was that I was able to tell the number-two person at the Foreign Service Institute that Mrs. Vance had just been so interested in this seminar for Ambassadors-designate that she wondered if it wouldn't be possible for the spouses of these Ambassadors-designate to be invited, and in addition, she would like to invite some of the Congressional wives to come, which would give them an insight into the Foreign Service. After due deliberation and arm-twisting and a little power play, it happened. The spouses of Ambassador's-designate were invited to come, originally for one session, eventually for the entire week, with one afternoon reserved for issues which would be strictly much more on what the spouses would be interested in.

At any rate, we had that first one and the spouses were there. Congressional wives came, and from there on in we had once again managed to open the door a little wider for spouses to really become the part of a team that they should be, but they can't be if they are closed out from it.

Q: I see this tremendous, enormous Ambassador's Spouse Notebook, published by the Overseas Briefing Center of the Foreign Service Institute. This is a tremendous accomplishment. Each spouse of an Ambassador-designate receives one of these?

ATHERTON: Receives one of those, properly updated with the names of the people they will want to see before they go out to post in the back, so that the body of it remains pretty much the same.

Q: I'm wondering if wives or spouses of Deputy Chiefs of Mission would receive any of this, either training or notebook, because many of them become, at one time or another, a Chargé d'Affaires?

ATHERTON: I know they receive the training. That took even longer than it did for the Ambassador's spouse one to happen. They do receive the training, and I think they do have a notebook of sorts; it's not quite so comprehensive as this tome. But, yes, I do believe they do. I know that they receive training now, and they didn't before.

Q: I notice some of the headings in the book: Pre-departure and Arrival; The Mission and Post Morale; The Residence and ORE (Official Residence Expenses) Expenses; Representation; Official Visits; Public Communication; Departure and Reentry; and so on.

ATHERTON: Right. That represents what happens when you are really desperate. We had a very abrupt departure, or should have been an abrupt departure from Cairo. We were on home leave in '83 when we received word that actually the new Ambassador for Egypt had been approved by the Egyptian Government, and we got a phone call to that effect while we were on home leave. What I heard Roy say on the telephone was, 'Well, you can't have two Ambassadors to Egypt, can you?' And that was how we learned that we were leaving.

We finished our home leave which was a wonderful trip through Canada, and we returned to Washington, DC, still not knowing what lay ahead for us, but Roy having decided that we would return to Cairo as planned, we would leave (there) as planned. Prior to leaving we would do the various trips we had planned, which included only official visits to parts of Egypt, and that we would not leave until November, no matter what. I was very proud of him. I think it was the first time he ever stood up to everybody and said, "Now it's my turn; we're going to do it my way." That was fine. He was on a selection committee for three weeks. We were in Washington. This was in September. We didn't know what the future held. We only knew that we were going back to Cairo to do the travel and to leave. I was furious!

I went over to Fanchon Silberstein at the Overseas Briefing Center-she was the Director. I said, "Fanchon, I'm so angry I've got to do something." And she said, 'Well, you know, we've been trying to put together this notebook for ambassadors' spouses, and I just can't get anybody to do it. Would you do it?' And I said, "I'd be glad to! And I'll put in it what I want to put in!" Well, I worked on it, I did the outlining for it, I began collecting information for it. We returned to Cairo. I put it on ice for a while, and when we came back from Cairo I then took out the two card tables we had before our own furniture arrived, put up the card tables, and began spreading all this out and began writing. And a year later I took a look at all that I had put together and thought, I can't do anything more than the raw data. Really that's it. I'm not angry anymore; we're all right. Roy is Director General of the Foreign Service, things are going all right. So I took all the raw material over to Fanchon, and I said, "Someone else is going to have to do the final organization, but here's what goes in." That's how it came to be. (chuckles)

Q: You must be very proud of it. It's marvelous.

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## BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse Entered Service: 1947 Left Service: 1985 You Entered Service: Same

Status: Wife of FSO Retired

Place/Date of birth: June 27, 1921, Chicago, Illinois

Maiden Name: Wylie

Parents (Name, Profession):

W. Edgar Wylie, Boy Scout Executive

Hattie Spencer Wylie, Homemaker

Schools: Monmouth College, Monmouth, Ill; Emerson College, Boston, MA

Date/Place of Marriage: May 26, 1946 - Quincy, Mass.

Profession: Teacher, Tutor

Children:

Lynne

Michael

Reed

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:A. At Post: Teacher and Principal, Damascus Community School; Teacher, Calcutta; Vice Chair, Fulbright Commission, Cairo; Chair, Schutz American School, Alexandria, Egypt

B. In Washington, DC: Teacher, Potomac School, National Cathedral School and Kingsbury Lab School; Chair, All Souls Church; AMIDEAST; Chair, Institute for Victims of Terrorism; International Student House

Honors (Scholastic, FS ):

Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters; Certificate of Appreciation from Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Secretary of State George Shultz

End of interview