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

RUTH CLEMENT BOND

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi

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Q: Jewell Fenzi on Thursday, November 12, 1992. I am interviewing Ruth Clement Bond at her home in Washington, DC.

I was struck immediately, when I saw your husband's biographic information in an old [Department of State Biographic] Register, by the fact that when you first went overseas, to Haiti, you taught English; then in Liberia you taught at the university. Suddenly there was a transition; when you went to Kabul you were a "housewife." What accounts for this difference?

BOND: At the first post, Haiti, my husband was director of the education program in a team of six or seven people, two of whom were women, sent out for the U.S. Government's Good Neighbor Policy in Latin America, which Nelson Rockefeller headed up. They taught languages, science, homemaking in some of the schools. My husband was called chief of party. Although I wasn't one of the team, I taught English, in the ï¿½cole normal, and also started working on my doctorate there, but after I had a baby I gave up that effort.

I began teaching English when my husband wanted to send one young man, an English teacher, to the United States to study. Max got a scholarship for him, but he said, "Dr. Bond, I can't take it because I can't support my family on that, because I will have to give up this job." So Max asked me, "Ruth, how would you like to teach English at the ï¿½cole normal?" And I said, "Why not." So the government paid him the salary and I did the work. He could go to America and have the two salaries coming in, the two sources.

I was head of the English Department at Kentucky State College when we got married in 1931. My field was English and I had gotten my degree at Northwestern. My new husband got a scholarship to the University of Southern California, so I went West with him and started on my doctorate there. Unfortunately... I started to say "unfortunately I became pregnant." That's not what I mean, but it was unfortunate for me because I was really enjoying my studies so much. I had to make a decision. I went to school as long as I could, and then I took time out to have the baby. Started back to school and left my baby with a woman who lived in one of those little [southern California] cottages, we lived in a cottage too. It was just a nice little neighborhood, a semicircle of houses with English, Korean and black American families, and of course we were black American too. A black American woman who lived in back of us, off the street, said, "Well, Mrs. Bond, I'll keep your baby for you."

So I said, "All right." I thought I had a solution. But about two days after I had started back to school I had to come home unexpectedly for something. I had my hours when I would come back regularly. I would leave the baby clothes, and a bottle with her, she knew when I was coming back. And then I came back unexpectedly. My baby was on her dirty kitchen floor, filthy, sucking on a piece of bacon and had an asafoetidic bag [a bitter resin with an obnoxious odor, thought to ward off disease] around her neck. So I began to think: which is more important to me, the health of my child or getting a PhD. I was making straight "A"s, I must say. I had even talked over with my advisor what my topic was going to be. I decided at that time that maybe I had better stay home with my baby. So I just gave up on my PhD, and thought I would do it later.

When my husband was called back to head a mission the Government was sending to the Tennessee Valley Authority, I found there was no college down there that I could attend to continue working on the PhD, so instead I set about organizing the women whose husbands were working on the TVA dam and who, for really the first time, were getting a lot of cash. Some of the workers had been sharecroppers. The Government built four houses for men who would move in with their families; the rest of the workers lived in big dormitories in a compound. We lived in one of the cottages that had been built as an experiment for people living there - because my husband thought that living outside the town provided me a chance to work with the women and show them what opportunities existed - they were buying pianos with cash, and they couldn't get them into their cottages! These country women were buying things they didn't need, yet weren't fixing up their houses.

I decided to start a program called "home beautification." We got donations from the cook in the dormitories, such as sacks he didn't need, which we dyed. We'd have one TVA room in each cottage and the women made curtains for it, wove some beautiful rugs, made new quilt patterns - our first quilt we called "Black Power." That was a pun, of course, TVA being about power, distinguished from black power of the 1960s. The first interns in the Authority came from many of the black colleges like Fisk and Tennessee State. My husband decided to open what he called a training and work program for them during the summer.

The women made a copy of the Black Power quilt for me, from the patterns I'd designed and with colors I'd chosen. It was stolen later, in storage with our effects in Atlanta. Someone told me that her husband might have given the first "Black Power" quilt to the TVA chief, Mr. David Lilienthal, though his son professed not to know about it. Now, I understand, the Smithsonian is taking the old quilt patterns, reproducing them for manufacture in China and sale in the U.S., which would probably diminish the value of U.S. handmade quilts. Some of us are protesting that these patterns are given to cheap labor in order to make quilts to sell at cheap prices.

The first quilt showed a bolt of lightning signifying power, held in the hand of a black worke[they locate a picture of the figure] instead of the banjo that he would normally hold. I gave the quilters the material cutouts and selected the colors. You can see the bolt of lightning he's holding in his right hand. [Fenzi asks to borrow the picture to make photocopy]

Q: This is fascinating. If you originated the term "black power"!

BOND: Some people say this. The student interns down there working on the dam with us who were from the universities were in the first intern program the Government had. Here's a write up that tells how the interns interpreted it.

Q: Thank you, and I'll copy the article about you, and the pictures.

BOND: I'm still trying to find where that first quilt is. I hadn't thought about the Smithsonian, possibly.

Q: Was each of the quilts making a political statement, or a woman's statement?

BOND: Well, in a way.

Q: Was there a theme to that do you remember?

BOND: The only thing I was trying to say was that things were opening up for the blacks in the SoutThis was in the early 1930s - I had only one child, born in California in 1933 when we down to TVA. My other son, J. Max Bond, Jr. was born in Louisville, Kentucky after we were moved to Knoxville to TVA headquarters. [Her second son, George Clement Bond was born in Knoxville, Tennessee.] When we went from California to TVA, my baby (she laughs) kept me from getting my PhD.

Q: Now, where did these very simple sharecropper women learn to do such marvelous quilting? From their parents?

BOND: You see, that's what the old black slaves used to do. And they told their stories in their quilts, you see. Oh, the quilts had names, you know, the kind that they made. I used to be able to call all that up. The one thing I could do was always to tie my husband in with the names he couldn't think of. Since he died there's a block there now.

Q: Because you've taken on all the things that he used to do and your mind is occupied.

BOND: I guess that's it. At any rate, we really beautified the people's homes. Everybody contracted to the TVA Authority had to have a "TVA room," we decided. If they didn't live in the compound, the husbands had to see that the steps were fixed up; we just fixed up the houses.

Q: And the TVA room had to have - what?Drapes made from the feed sacks?

BOND: They didn't have to have it but they didn't have any other way, so it meant most of them did have that - you know, like napkins. We approached the cook at the commissary, who had lots of sacks for flour and whatnot, and we bleached them and dyed them. The women were very skillful and knew how to quilt, beautifully because that's what they did. Their mothers had made quilts for the "big house", so they did a skillful job; I never learned to quilt but I made and cut the patterns and made the designs for them.

Q: Those quilts stayed in their homes, most of the time?

BOND: Yes.

Q: So the few surviving ones of course at this point must be very valuable?

BOND: They must be.

Q: And they should be.

BOND: I'm going to get off this quilt business. Merikay, when she was looking for the quilt, called me and said, "You know, a woman whose grandmother lived on the TVA has a quilt that she says that her grandmother designed, and it's one of your quilts." She had it on exhibit - it wasn't the 'Power' one, it was another one - in Kentucky, I think it was. She went down to see it, and she said "this old woman designed the quilt."The old woman hadn't designed the quilt.

Q: She maybe had made it?

BOND: She made the quilt, yes, but she used my patterns, my design. Maybe she had a copy of a quilt that was made from the same paper pattern that I had - I made the patterns and just left them there and I helped the women cut their patterns. Then they took the quilts, and then when they made another quilt, maybe the design wouldn't be as true - you know what I mean. I don't think one of these designs is as nice as my design, it's basically the same design.

Q: Had you studied art at all? Or quilting?

BOND: No but I've always been very artistic. I can show you things up there that I did. That little figure on the end of the mantel here I did. I'll tell you how I got into that - in Haiti.

Q: Oh, the primitive arts there, yes!

BOND: Well, the [U.S.] Government employed Glenn Lucan from California, a famous potter. He couldn't speak French. Now, this is our first foreign assignment, but he was a wonderful potter, and he was teaching the Haitians to make fancier things than they were making. So he asked me, "When I go out, will you go with me and translate?"

Q: Was this to create a cottage industry?

BOND: Yes. While I was going around with him, he said, "Mrs. Bond, why don't you just learn to pot too?" I made the little batch up there and some of those along there - I just found I could, just pot. I made mine with coils, I didn't use the wheels that they had, I did it all sculpting by hand.

The Ambassador's wife at that time, Mrs. Orme Wilson, was from a famous Eastern family. When she found I was working with Haitians, "Let's make some garments for them, let's take them some things that they can use." She'd pick me up in her car. I'd always wait for her to get in, then she'd say, "Get in, get in!" And we'd go and distribute the things that we were going to give to the poor. My biggest contribution was to teach. I tutored some of the women who wanted to learn English. They'd come to my house. One of these women had a daughter who was wife of the Minister of Education. Everything I did there was volunteer.

Q: And then you went off to Liberia.

BOND: Yes. The governor of Liberia, President [William] Tubman, asked our government, since they wanted a university, to send someone out to help them establish a university. President Tubman asked Max to go and talk with him and see what could be done.I went with him. The President said he wanted a university. They had high schools run by missionaries, and one missionary group had a college way up-country from Monrovia but the President wanted a university in Monrovia.

He appointed Max as president, so he became the first college president but he was paid by the American government. Well, the students wanted to strike against the government. Max wasn't doing anything about it because he didn't feel - Tubman said, "You know one thing? I'm going to take you off your government's payroll and put you on my payroll, so that when I say that we're going to strike, we'll strike." (she laughs) It wasn't as blunt as that. He told Max to encourage the students to strike. Max said, "I can't encourage them to strike. I'm paid by the United States Government, I can't be out here making people strike."

We had a wonderful foreign tour. At any rate, after Max became paid by Liberia, the students did strike once, for things Max felt they should have. You see, they couldn't buy any food on campus. They'd come into town, walk out to the campus, and there was no housing for them, and no food except what they brought. So Max had the school buy a bus, which would go into town every morning to the place where our government had their aid-to-Liberia projec[they try to give it a name, Bond can't recall it but remembers that doctors and teachers were sent; they decide it was probably through "ECA" then] [End of tape 1, side A]

We were sent by Point IV to Afghanistan. Yes, that's what we were called, Point IV.

Q: You taught in Monrovia, didn't you.

BOND: Yes. Liberia put in a request for teachers. [they pause to look at pictures of university buildings Tubman had built, etc. in a "yearbook"]The people worked well with me because I didn't try to promote ... [trailing off]

Q: What is your family background?

BOND: My mother was the first black woman chosen as "Mother of America," when we were in Haiti. Max was giving a party for a visiting Nelson Rockefeller at our house and a Haitian came in and said, in French, not knowing how good my French was, "Oh, they say a black woman is 'Mother of America' now." One fellow who didn't really know anything about it said, "Yes, some scrub woman out of New York."

Q: I hope you set him straight?

BOND: I was amazed. No, I didn't have to set him straight. Another black American couple there, one of my friends said, "What do you mean?" And she really gave him "what for", because my father was a bishop and my mother - we lived in a 20-room house then; because there was such deep segregation in the South at that time. When public conferences would come, or when carloads of preachers who were under impoverished dioceses would come down, there was no place for them to stay unless you kept them.

We were living in Louisville. I was born there, then we moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, where Papa was editor of the church paper. We moved back to Louisville when I was still a child. Mr. Ohrbacher, a millionaire there, who had a big mansion in midtown, intended to move to Florida. I don't know how he met Papa but when there were big gatherings in the city and blacks and whites were together, this man said, "Bishop Clement, you need a big house." Papa had already selected a smaller house in a black community. The man said, "You're going to have to entertain people when they come through here and we get together." So he sold Papa the house, at a minimal price, $21,000, and we lived in that. My father said he would have to keep every carload of blacks who came through the city! (laughter)

All seven of us went to college. My mother was from Providence, Rhode Island. She was a daring sort of person. She had been reared in the north and she had no fear of anybody. In Charlotte, the short time we lived there, they had street cars. Mamma would take me by the hand when we got ready to get on a street car, and we would get right on. Mamma never would hold back like the other black women did to let the white people get on first. Mamma never did that. So we children had a different feeling. I thought white people were just people. Some people were sort of afraid of Mamma, just as some blacks were afraid of white people. But we never were.

Everybody in my family was an achiever, in the sense that they gave freely of whatever we had to give. There was a great sense of community service right in the family. You couldn't get out of doing community things, and everyone of us - I had six brothers and sisters - kept that sense of community spirit. I loved to read and didn't always want to give up my books for a meeting. Sometimes I would hide in the downstairs lavatory if I knew I had to go to Girl Reserves, or the YWCA or something like that. Papa would ask, "Where's Ruth?" and then he would come and knock on the door.

So I always had that sense of community service wherever we went.

Q: There was a great sense of community right in the family, that you took with you directly to Tennessee to the TVA.

BOND: Exactly. My sister [eventually] became president of all the Methodist women in North America. A younger sister, a PhD at Ohio State. My oldest brother is the first black man to get a PhD from Northwestern University. [more family education history]

Q: So, off you went, with that sense of community service, to Haiti, and Liberia, and then Afghanistan.

BOND:I think I was the only American who was, at that time, 1955, invited into an Afghan home. My very good friend whose husband worked under our ambassador in Afghanistan, said she never got into a home. [They discuss her taking charge of the commissary, about which the Ambassador wrote her, "This is the most competent job I've ever seen."]

Q: So, what did you do in Afghanistan besides buying nice rugs, which I see right here?They're both lovely.

BOND: I had a project there too. We American wome[she tries to recall but can't]

Q: How did you manage to be invited into an Afghan home? One of the women I interviewed told me - I believe it was her landlord - would say, "Meet us up on the roof" and his wife would come up on the roof and they'd talk back and forth like that. I don't think she was invited ...

BOND: They told me I was the first American woman that had ever been invited. A first cousin of the king had married another cousin of the king and had studied in America and had taken his wife with him. When he came back, she had to go back behind the veil. One day he said to me, "You know my wife, she's got to meet an American woman. Would you like to meet my wife?"I said, "Of course I would."

So he invited not only me to his house but also my husband - they were very good friends. Later they had to flee to Iran. Ambassador to Afghanistan was Angus Ward, who Mrs. Bond describes as "different." His foreign born wife was difficult. "You didn't take a step toward her until she took a step toward you.]"

Q: Later you went to Tunis and could use your French agaiBy the time my husband and I went to Tunis, in 1967, we found the women really were more liberated.

BOND: I organized a group to sew for the Tunisian children. They used to meet in my house and we would make garments. One other thing I did, which I wouldn't be telling to everybody:we found out that along the border between Tunisia and Algeria, were a lot of refugees who had crossed into Tunisia and needed food.

Our government was sending food up there to them. Someone came back and said our food was making them sick. We were sending them canned stuff, but they would put their brackish water in the food and cook it, also in the milk - we were sending them lots of it because there were babies up there.

The Ambassador's wife wasn't interested in doing anything for the Tunisians. So we organized some five carloads of women to go to the border and took canned milk, clothes - little jackets and things like that to these Algerian refugees, and showed them how to use the Sterno stoves, and told them if they opened a can of beans, say, not to put any water to it.

Q: They were probably trying to "stretch" the food.

BOND: That'it. But if they had to use water, boil it on these little Sterno stoves. That was really quite a success.

Q: How often did you make that trip?

BOND: Oh, just one journey there, it was a long trip in cars; but we did for other people in the nearby community. [She tries to recall names of the U.S. women who went with her to the border.]

Q: I can just see a pattern of community service right from the very beginning with the TVA right down to - what did you do in Freetown, the only one of your posts where I've been stationed?

BOND: I taught English there, at the YWCA, I think. I coached some of the children of professors, always with the encouragement of my husband of course; he would urge me to "get out there and do some work," because he felt he was not really taking me away from what I was pursuing, which was really more intellectual.

Q: That's why I think it's so marvelous. Here you had this intellectual background, and intellectual interests, and you were able to throw yourself right into quilt-making with these really very humble women in TVA.

BOND: In a way, since I had a simple demeanor, let's say, I had dear friends in every country that I lived in. [They compare notes about activities both enjoyed in Freetown. Bond's husband solicited and delivered carloads of used textbooks from a U.S. school, all sent upcountry and unloaded by Bonds and missionaries when local people refused to do "heavy lifting"]. When we were in Haiti my daughter went to a Catholic school. When we went to Malawi, my daughter recognized one of the Sisters whom she'd gone to school in another country with as a little girl.

Q: Of course, you were abroad for a long time, and you were not here, as I wasn't, during any of the civil rights events in the States.

BOND: We came back in 1965. We were out for most of that time. My husband was very outspoken, he even spoke out against things our government was doing - he didn't speak out to the people in the country [Haiti], he wrote papers against [U.S. actions]. When we left Haiti, all the people thought that Max was coming back as ambassador and were saying, "Goodbye, we'll see you soon." And when we came back here, all the important black people here knew that Max was going to be a black ambassador.

When Max wrote an article to the State Department, or to somebody here, protesting that the Haskell sugar people were taking all the fertile land from the Haitians, who had to plant their food on the steep hills, and the water came down and washed the crops out, and that we were doing an injustice to the people of the country, well, when Haskell heard that Max was going to be appointed ambassador to Haiti, [she slaps her palm] No way!

Q: In a case like that, I would rather be married to the man who speaks out and tells the truth than the one who glosses it over and goes to Haiti as ambassador.

BOND: Of course you would. I would too. They sent a black ambassador who was accepted. Anyway we had exciting posts, and we got them partly because Max would speak out [End of tape 1]

When we arrived in Afghanistan, the first thing the ambassador asked Max was "Oh Dr. Bond. Why are you here? What did you do wrong." Well, what had he [Ambassador Angus Ward] done? Maybe he had spoken out too much. I don't know what he had done. The Indian ambassador's wife and I became good friends. We were the only two foreign women that the Afghans would let work with their women. One of the prominent ministers let the two of us work with the Afghan women to teach poor women how to use patterns - my sister and some of my friends would mail me patterns. Some of the American women said to me, "We don't understand why they let you [work with them] and won't let us come in."Some [high up American women] must have protested, because when I went to the building one day I was told, "We can't have any foreigners." Now, this was just for women! It was a big building for women where they taught them to sew, to cook and how to use patterns - I had my sisters sending out patterns, and the Indian ambassador's wife and I were helping them to sew. I had to stop going because they wouldn't let us work with the women. But anyway I still had some friends. Some of the Afghans who were very high up would invite me to affairs they gave for women. But most of the time I would be the only American women there. The French women would be there, the Catholic women would come and some of the others from different countries. We weren't being limited to these things though. They would give something, say, for Dr. Bond and his wife. The Frenchman would bring his wife, and the German would bring his wife, and the Englishman would bring his wife, and Max would bring me. I must say I was a privileged person in that country. Privileged in the sense that the women would let me into their homes.

Q: It would be a great achievement, I'd think, being admitted to Afghan homes.

BOND: I know I was the only American woman but I didn't ask any of the other [third country] women if they ever got into an Afghan home; I don't know what they did, the German woman... I'm going to stop talking. I'm not going to tell any more stories!

Q: Tell me about when you came back to Washington and you helped Naomi [Mathews, president] with AAFSW. What was your title there?

BOND: I started off as vice president under somebody else other than Naomi. [She can't recall; then to reassure her, JF says Bond can edit tape later. Bond feels that she has talked more freely than she ordinarily would, wouldn't say these things to anybody who might use them. Bond has revealed private things.]

Q: What I would like to use in the book we're writing is your family background, your sense of community service and how you took that with you everywhere. I think I would like to mention that you were the only American woman during your stay in Kabul who was admitted into the Afghan home, which certainly won't offend anyone.. [emphasizes she avoids using negatives, emphasizes substantive things FS women do. Notes that although they have been talking for almost two hours, Bond has never mentioned giving a dinner party, which is public perception of Foreign Service.] I haven't asked you about Blantyre [Malawi] but I imagine you did the same thing there as everywhere else. What else did you do as AAFSW vice president?

BOND: Polly Jones, the ambassador's wife in Tunis, knew I'd worked with Tunisian women and had organized things. And June Byrne [Spencer] and I had always been good friends in Tunis, and I missed her so much. They left Tunis before we did. When we returned home, Polly was president of AAFSW. Polly said to me, "Ruth, so many of our women come back who aren't Washingtonians, they don't know anybody here and yet they want to help in the community, want something to do - find a place where they'll feel comfortable yet do something helpful."

I told that to a friend here and she said, "I'll tell you a place that really needs - the boys club in Southeast, that used to be an all-white boys club but is now all black. I'll introduce you to the fellow who's director there."He said, "We'll be glad to have you." So then he set out to find people, local people, who wanted to join the Foreign Service women who wanted to work. He said, "There's a woman who's head of the Mother's Club who comes and cooks for them, ask her. Another woman who keeps a place for homeless women who're paid for, she's doing a fine job, I think she'd ought to be in here too. She has plenty of ideas."

I knew a fellow who'd been at the London School of Economics with my son, who introduced me to his mother, who then said she had known me a long time. She said, "Well, Ruth, I'll come and work with you and I'll bring some women with me." So she brought Laura Carson, who had been a principal. She brought top grade black women into that group there, along with white women too. I'm only using black and white so you will get the complex of it.

I said, "Well, who else can we get?" A man who was on the board of the boys club up here in the city said, "I'm black, I can get you a person, I think Helen Smith would come." Another woman, a white woman, said, "I'd like to work with you, I do real estate but I'm not doing that all the time, I'd like work." And so the nucleus of that came out of Polly Jones suggesting that we form something up there where people could come, and we could offer them anything they wanted - how to painSo we got a nucleus of people at all levels, and a wonderful mix of women who came - some poor, some rich, some black, some white; all of them nice. We worked together and we're still working together.

Q: Is this the group that Lesley Dorman - a boys and girls club?

BOND: Yes. It's called Eastern Branch. Lesley came into the group when she heard what we were doing. June Byrne Spencer also came. Polly spread the word and some other Foreign Service women came. Some had butterfly collections. Another fellow taught wood carving. We had a lot of books donated to the library. I was the catalyst, and some of the finest women we had were those who came in in the beginning.

Q: You also helped with the AAFSW Bookfair?

BOND: Oh yes. Each year that we've been here, I've helped with that. I think I was second vice president, first vice president, never became president. Somebody raised the question that Max wasn't working for the State Department anymore.

Q: That explains it - you do have to be an active Foreign Service wife to be president.

BOND: I'm glad to know thaNaomi and I worked together very well. I represented Foreign Service women in New York.

Q: Do you remember any discussions about the '72 Directive at AAFSW meetings when you were there?That was the Directive that made us independent, you could take a job if you could find one, you had no responsibility to the mission at all. Of course, that didn't really affect you, you were retired when that came out. That was all happening during Naomi's incumbency.

BOND: Yes, it was, I remember that, but it didn't affect me personally.

Q: I have one more question. Did you have any close influence over your famous nephew Julian?

BOND: No, I didn't know Julian very well. They lived in Atlanta. My children were already in college when we were traveling. Julian's father Horace taught in the university of which my brother was president. We never lived in the same city and Horace's children were younger than my children.

Q: Is your father in "Who's Who," or your husband, or both?

BOND: Both. But maybe not in the edition on the [library] shelf. And my mother too. And my sister is listed in "Who's Who." I'm listed in "Who's Who of Women in America," and my other sister is listed there too. My father was Bishop George C. Clement. And my brother was Dr. RufuClement. My mother's name was Emma Clarissa Williams Clement.

My husband's father, a Congregational minister was a prominent American too. He was head of an organization in Kentucky, I can't recall its name. Our house was large so interracial groups could meet in Louisville. They'd hold their receptions in Papa's house, I told you how the diocese paid a fortune for it [even though the house was bought at a nominal price], which is known as the Ohrbacher Mansion. It had halls that were wide enough to dance in. The first floor had seven rooms and one was a bedroom. Papa had a study and he had a den, all that sort of thing. Ordinarily the church would never have bought a house like that - at that time the church wasn't buying the bishops houses - but Papa needed it because of segregation.

Q: What happened to the house, is it still there?

BOND: It was there the last time I went.(showing a picture of it)

Q: Oh, isn't that grand!What fun to play in.

BOND: The stairway was so wide, it went circular up. It broke at the first landing and there was a big mirror and you could see yourself coming down after you dressed and could see how you looked. The Ohrbachers sold it for a nominal amount. So we lived there, and everybody who came to Louisville who wanted to stay there could stay.

Q: But your mother probably had help

BOND: Oh yes, we always had help.

Q: So it wasn't as though she was trying to do it alone. That makes a big difference.

BOND: Of course it does.

Q: That is a wonderful place. What fun to grow up there.

BOND: It was lots of fun. You could slide down the bannisters, and when you got where you had to turn, then you turned and [slid on] - I used to always take the steps two at a time. They were broad, with low risers. I have sturdy legs for my age!

Q: I'm sure that has something to do with it, and the fact that you lived - my husband and I say "we live vertically" because we have a town house and we're up and down stairs all day long.

BOND: It's good for you.

Q: Your mother was a good friend of Marian Anderson. Your mother was a pianist?

BOND: She would give concerts in church. Even Marian Anderson had to give concerts in churches because there was no place where a black person could sing.

Q: I saw that in her documentary on PBS television.

BOND: Later, when my brother became president of Atlanta University, she'd come to Atlanta to give [a] concert. Even when she could have gone somewhere else she always stayed with my brother. As a girl long ago she had said - I guess she's forgotten it - "I was always pleased to be on a program with your mother." My mother had a beautiful voice. She had seven children. I got my name Ruth because she had the lead in a play called "Ruth the Gleaner." She was pregnant with me at the time, so when I was born they named me Ruth. Well, my father said they named me that after his sister Ruth, and my mother said they named me after Ruth the gleaner. I was very fortunate in having good, well-educated, participative, well-spoken mother and father, who didn't allow us to mistreat anybody either, even one another. Nor did they allow us to speak broken English. And we always had to come down for a meal. Whoever was there when dinner was being served had to come and sit at the table. There were seven of us, and Mother and Father at table, and sometimes the person who was helping us, making ten. One girl, they sent through college. If the person wanted to go to college and was young, then they'd send her away to college.

Q: As you got older she was more like a mother's helper.

BOND: That's right.

Q: Your mother would go across town...

BOND: Instead of going to church with us, she would go across town and play as organist or soloist. She wouldn't go in the surrey, which had two seats, I always would ride in the surrey, but Mother went in the buggy. We had two horses. I always considered it a privilege if Mama would pick me out to drive with her in the buggy across town to where she was going to play. I was just the age when I would sit well, not like my younger sister who might squirm on the seat and fall out or something. So I would drive my mother to church, but I had to come back home for Sunday school, which all of us attended together.

I had a fascinating life because my parents did so many nice things for us. They were respected, and they respected everybody in the community. They spoke to everybody in the community. Which doesn't sound like anything, but you know in some communities, everybody doesn't speak to everybody.

Q: In Washington, DC!(laughter)

BOND: And as I told you, she was the first black woman to be chosen Mother of America. We grew up to respect the rights of others and to do what we could - not in any superior way but as comrades with everybody with whom we came in contact. That has always been our credo. There were many others, I'm not saying we were the only family like that.

Q: But actually, being a minister's ambitious wife especially, is a little bit like being a Foreign Service wife - you are on display.

BOND: Exactly.

Q: Your life is a goldfish bowl. And if anything, you should perhaps have more rigorous standards than other people.

BOND: Yes, be more susceptible to what's happening around you. Anyway, when we would all be at the dinner or breakfast table, if somebody made a grammatical error, they would have to get up from the table and open a window up. You were careful of your speech, not only because you were well-spoken but you didn't adopt the language of the street, as many children do who come from families that speak beautiful English.

On Sunday mornings my mother played the piano at breakfast and we all sang. Then on special occasions if we weren't too rushed we went around the table - at that time there would be nine of us - we'd have to say a little Bible verse. We'd try to have little new verses to say. And Papa read poetry to us and we would try to solve puzzles. It was fun to see if we could solve them - like a man was on one side of a river and he had a fox and a goose...

Q: And he had a bag of feed, and how did he get them all across.

BOND: That's it. Papa was demanding about things, such as spelling.

Q: Demanding, but in a very nice warm, supportive, positive way.

BOND: Yes. When I was little, Papa's office was nearer to school than our house was and I used to do what Mama didn't like - instead of coming home with the children, I'd slip off and go to Papa's office and wait till he was ready to come home. I was very fond of both of them but my mother was a different temperament. I'm glad she was. I'm glad she made you pick up your room, and made you speak to people - I mean, she really kept us in line.

Q: Well, of course she thought that was her motherly duty and I guess it was.

BOND: I was one of three little ones. My sister was younger than I but my two brothers just younger than I were a year apart and I was a year apart, so we were very close together.

Q: Who were those two brothers?

BOND: George and James. James became a minister, he studied theology a[can't recall name]. My brother George was more a young fellow of the world. [End of tape 2, side A]

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Added: Addendum paragraph submitted per Mrs. Bond 4/21/95:

It is important to point out in this transcript that even though I was all over the world with my husband, I managed to raise three children who have done very well in life. My oldest child, Jane Clement Bond, has a PhD in French History from London University and is now a professor of History at Baruch College, City University of New York. My second child, J. Max Bond, Jr., received his post graduate architectural degree from Harvard University. Since then, he has had a distinguished career as an architect. He has been chairman of the department of architecture at Columbia University, and is currently a full partner in the prestigious architectural New York firm of Davis, Brody and Associates. My third child, George Clement Bond, received his PhD in anthropology from the London School of Economics. Currently, he is the Director of the African Institute of Columbia University and he is a full professor at Columbia Teachers College.

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BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Dr. J. Max Bond (Deceased)

Spouse's Position: Education administration

Spouse Entered Service:1944Left Service: 1966You Entered Service:SameLeft Service:

Status: Widow of AID official

Place/Date of birth: Louisville, Kentucky 1904

Maiden Name: Clement

Parents (Name, Profession):

George Clinton Clement, Bishop

Emma Clarisa Clement

Schools (Prep, University):

Livingstone College (Salisbury, NC)

Northwestern University, BA, MA

Profession: Teacher, Professor, Housewife

Date/Place of Marriage: Louisville, Kentucky, 1931

Children:

Jane Emma Bond

James Max Bond

George Clement Bond

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:A. At Post: Haiti - Professor of English, Martisan Teacher Training School for Girls; translator and participant in Arts and Crafts project for Good Neighbor policy. Liberia - Chair, Department of English, University of Liberia; tutored Liberian students already accepted in American universities; organized tutoring service in English for wives of foreign professors at University of Liberia; Afghanistan - Substitute director of U.S. commissary; worked with Afghan organization for women. Tunisia - Organized FS wives to transport care packages and equipment to Algerian refugees on Tunisian-Algerian border; distributed care packages sent by American women to children in Tunisian hospitals; organized sewing group to make layettes for babies. Sierra Leone and Malawi - worked with women'and youth (Malawi) organizations.

B. In Washington, DC: Student advisor for African American Institute; revitalized African-American Women's Association; organized Women's Auxiliary of Eastern Branch Boys Club; elected officer, Foreign Service Women's Association. Listed in Who's Who of American Women; Women's Foreign Policy Council Directory; Soft Covers for Hard Times.

End of interview