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

Foreign Service Spouse Series

ELIZABETH STURGIS GREW LYON

Interviewed by Jewell FenzilInitial interview date: April 7, 1987

[This initial interview was an informal, introductory conversation with Mrs. Lyon and her sister, Lilla Grew Moffat Lï¿½vitt, and their cousin, Elizabeth Lewis Cabot. Mrs. Lyon and her sisters were Foreign Service offspring who later became Foreign Service spouses. At Mrs. Lyon's request, most references to the McCarthy era were deleted from the transcript]

Lï¿½VITT: That was while they were in Turkey.

Q: And there was an account of you [Lï¿½vitt] in your Father's memoirs, too, of spending five hours...

LYON: That was Anita - Anita swimming from the Black Sea 19 miles to the [Sea of] Marmara. She was a very strong swimmer. We swam across the Bosporus. But I don't think we were five hours in the water. She was the great swimmer.

Lï¿½VITT: She was five and a half hours in the water.

LYON: She was so fabulous. They got up early, she and Daddy, and they went to the mouth of the Black Sea and she got in the water and my father followed her in a rowboat. And he took along our portable gramophone and he would play "I'm Following You." And he took a thermos of cocoa and things to feed her. And when they got abreast of our country house on the Bosporus, which was way down the line, I got into the water to join them, but I could not keep up, Anita was such a steady, strong swimmer. I had to get into the boat because I was holding things up. I couldn't keep up her pace, even briefly, even though she had already been in the water two and a half hours.

Q: But your Father must have been an avid swimmer.

LYON: He wasn't all that avid a swimmer, but he loved water and he loved boats. Because of his having had scarlet fever as a boy, and being deaf ever since he had scarlet fever - one ear was absolutely deaf - and it had left him deaf, and he always had to be very careful to keep his head out of the water and so on. But he loved boats, he was always boating, and on the Bosporus he would always be watching all the ships going by.

Lï¿½VITT: He used to spend his summers as a boy in Manchester, Massachusetts, and do a lot of sailing, rather than swimming.

LYON: But he did accompany us on our cross Bosporus swims, and the first time we tried, we got within 100 feet of the shore, and the current swept us back, we couldn't land. Then another time, you had to wait for a good day when the wind would be blowing from the south, from the Marmara, and then we managed to make it. We swam across, and a little eight year old girl belonging to a Standard Oil family came along with us and got across, and it was about a mile and a half swim.

Q: Anita was in, was it the Guinness Book of Records?

Lï¿½VITT: It may well have been. She had a lot of fan mail.

LYON: She was really a very strong swimmer. She was told later that she had not done her heart any good by all this swimming. But at the time that didn't worry her. She had pushed too much.

Q: It seems to me that the residence in Turkey was a rather...

Lï¿½VITT: It was interesting.

LYON: A marble staircase like the Women's Museum.

Lï¿½VITT: Very high ceilings, and it had been built by some Turk for his lady love, and it had only one bedroom, a great big beautiful bedroom. And there were servant's rooms on the top floor

LYON: We were in the servant's rooms on the top floor.

Lï¿½VITT: So it was difficult for my Mother.

LYON: We were right next door to a cafe, Novothy's, and they would play music all night and first my sister and I found that rather fun but it made getting to sleep rather difficult. This White Russian orchestra would play all these wonderful pieces, but it would always go on night after night after night.

CABOT: I seem to remember a nice boat on the Bosporus.

LYON: Oh, we used to use that, and when we went to Therapia we took a house... Were you there?

CABOT: No, but I used that boat several times afterwards. (Ohhhhh) It was left to the Embassy.

Lï¿½VITT: This was the barge that Admiral Bristol had left, and when that conked out they got a boat called...

CABOT: The only Embassy that had a barge and a boat for years.

LYON: And then the Heather, and then the Halberg was the last one we got which was sort of a speed boat. But the Heather we used for picnics to go up to a beach near the Black Sea. So the five years in Turkey were interesting, and Lilla and Pierrepont came to visit.

Lï¿½VITT: Twice. We were in Switzerland, in Bern, and I remember coming by boat from Venice through the Adriatic, and the other time by the Orient Express.

LYON: We used to go from Venice to Istanbul by boat. We would stop in Brindisi and Pireaus, for Athens, and it would go through the Corinth Canal. It was very interesting. But we also made many trips on the Orient Express, which was three days and three nights on the train, and that was the only way to get out.

Q: That was one of the most elegant trains of all times?

LYON: Well, it may have been in the movies. But I came across letters I wrote my Father when he had stayed behind, and I said that Mummy was so cruel, she watched me while she made me wash in a handful of water which was filled with black from the coal, and I was complaining bitterly at having to wash in that. No, it wasn't all that luxurious. I used to sit on a seat in the hall, looking out the window.

Lï¿½VITT: Before the family left Turkey, my next sister, Anita, married an American Foreign Service officer, Robert English, and the wedding was in the Embassy in February [27, 1932], and then just before they were assigned to Budapest, my parents were assigned to Japan.

LYON: And the way we heard, Lilla was having her second child - she had a daughter born in Bern, Edith - and she was in Washington with Pierrepont - what was his job then?

Lï¿½VITT: He was Chief of the Western European Division. Later when they made it all one, he was Chief of the European...

LYON: And Lilla was having a baby, and Peter [Moffat] was born January 17, 1932, and we got a cable, "Peter sends Grandfather heartiest congratulations." Nothing had been confirmed about his [Joseph C. Grew] going to Japan [as Ambassador]. It had not been officially announced, but it had leaked at home. And so in March we left, March 13, I will never forget. Because although Turkey hadn't been all that happy all the time, still when the time came to leave, there was great nostalgia. Then we went home, and I really can't remember why we were home so long, because we didn't actually get to Japan until June [6, 1932].

Lï¿½VITT: Well Daddy probably had his two month's home leave.

Q: Let's see, what year was that?

LYON: 1932. We went home by way of Paris and London, and...

Lï¿½VITT: And so the new baby was Pamela's husband, Peter. [Reference to Pamela Moffat, President of AAFSW, at time of interview]

LYON: Who later went in the Foreign Service and became Ambassador to Chad and is now in the War College.

Q: So that is the third generation Foreign Service. Your grandfathers were not in the Foreign Service?

LYON: No

Q: It began with your father, this dynasty.

LYON: Father. My father had to break away. His father wanted him to be a publisher in Boston. He thought [Daddy] was crazy when he wanted to go into the Foreign Service, as you know....

Lï¿½VITT: Or banking, the brothers were in banking.

LYON: But apparently a job was awaiting my father in the publishing business, in Boston, but his father allowed him a trip around the world, and that did it.

Q: So then your Father went to Japan. But that must have been about the time that you [Lyon] and your husband were in China.

LYON: No, I went to Japan with the family. And we arrived in June 1932. And while we were home on leave, at Decatur House - Marie Beale's historic Decatur House - she was giving a party for us and Cecil and I always argue about it, I say it was a reception, he says it was a lunch. But she said [to Cecil], "I've got Elsie Grew, I want you to come and balance her." And his first impression of me as he saw me standing in a doorway was that I was very large. And that was the only impression I made on him.

Q: It wasn't lasting, let's put it that way.

LYON: Then we went off to Japan, and we arrived June 6, and Cecil had mentioned to me that he was going to Hong Kong as vice consul, but they were also talking of having to drop the lowest 100 members of the Service because of lack of funds. So there was some question of him becoming my Father's private secretary if he were dropped. But then that was rescinded, it was changed, and my Father asked the Rector at Groton whom he recommended, and he recommended Jeff Parsons. You may be interviewing Peggy Parsons at some point. And Jeff became his private secretary and went out with us, and anyway we went to Japan and I was thrilled from the first word go. I loved it there, just loved it. And I knew that Cecil was coming out at some point on his way to Hong Kong. I had gone up to the mountains, but the two Roosevelt boys, the sons of the Governor General of the Philippines, were going to come out, and we knew that, I forget their exact names at this point, but I knew they were coming through, and my Father wanted me to come down from the mountains to help entertain them the day they would be in Japan. So I was to go to the boat to get them off the boat and take them to see the Daibutsu in Kamakura, and then go and have a swim at Hayama where we had a house on the sea, and then bring them back to Tokyo for lunch.

And while I was on the ship I was standing in front of the purser's office, and I said, "Do you have a Cecil Lyon by any chance on board?" It was just a shot in the dark, and they said yes, but he has left for Tokyo.

And so I thought well, that's too bad, I've missed him. And we went to the Diabutsu, the great Buddha in Kamakura, and a group from the ship was already there, and Cecil stepped out of the group and said hello. And I said, "Oh, can't you come with us!" So he went to his group and said the Ambassador had sent for him. And he joined us, and he stayed with the boys and me, and we went up to Tokyo, and we were together all day and did things, and then gave them dinner and put them on the train for Kobe, where they were to rejoin the boat.

And the next time I went down to Hayama on the sea, the housekeeper said that one of the danasans had left a watch. Well, the chances were two to one that it was the Roosevelts, and one that it was Cecil. But I wrote Cecil and said, "Did you leave your watch?" "No, but if you will send it to me I will see that it reaches the Roosevelts." "Thank you very much." "Not at all." The correspondence went on, and he decided to come and spend his leave in Tokyo, which he was going to do. But he got as far as Shanghai on the boat, and he got a telegram saying, "You are assigned to Tokyo." And he threw the telegram in the water because it was sent by Ernest Black, who was always playing practical jokes. He didn't believe it, and after having thrown the telegram in the water he thought, "Supposing it were true?" So, I forget how he confirmed it, but he went back to Hong Kong, packed up, and came to Tokyo. And that was Memorial Day, '33, and we got engaged a month later, June 30, and were married on my parents' 28th wedding anniversary, October 7, in Tokyo, in the Embassy.

Lï¿½VITT: And then you were sent to Peking, because they don't allow families at the same post.

LYON: We were sent to Peking for five years.

Q: And then Tientsin.

LYON: We weren't in Tientsin. We went through, the boat lands in Tangku, we landed and it was blocked with ice. They had to get an icebreaker to get us off the boat. And the boat we traveled on, the rudder broke, the wireless broke, Cecil didn't dare tell me. I was in the cabin feeling rather unhappy, with our big police dog. And my mother had sent her Austrian maid, Mizai, to help me settle and we weren't enjoying ourselves very much, it was so rough. And Cecil would be up on deck and get all these reports about the rudder and the wireless, but finally we made it. There were a lot of cockroaches on the boat. So then we arrived in the middle of the night and were taken on an icebreaker to the station of Tientsin, and sat there all night until the express roared through at two in the morning. And we arrived at Peking at five in the morning. That was our introduction.

Q: Travel really was... It may sound romantic, but it was arduous.

LYON: Oh, very. And then Mrs. Johnson [wife of the Minister] very kindly took us in, and she was the kindest, dearest most wonderful chefesse anyone could have.

Q: This must be Jane, who I met several weeks ago.

LYON: I met Betty Jane [Johnson daughter] at the Museum. I knew her before she was born. She is a trustee, and oh Jane was wonderful. She was so good to me those first years in a new post.

Because it is not easy to go from being an Ambassador's daughter to the wife of the lowest of the low.

Q: What kind of revelation was that?

LYON: I realized that I was very spoiled.

Q: Did you realize that you had seen the Foreign Service from...

LYON: From a different viewpoint.

Q: From an absolute, marvelous pinnacle...

LYON: It was just right, and having to start, it wasn't all easy, I can tell you. There were always wives who would resent one, and put you down a few notches. And, well, I'm sure Elizabeth has been through it too.

CABOT: We all did it when we were young.

Q: This is where you knew Caroline Service.

LYON: Oh, and then Caroline came a little later, when I was sort of settled in Peking. And they went to Yunnanfu, where Jack was Consul. But they stayed with us in Peking. Later he came back to Peking to be a language student, and we became very close friends. And then she was with me in Chinwangtao at the start of the war. And her parents arrived on an army ship to visit her, and she met them and things were really popping. And I had sent Cecil a telegram saying, "What's the temperature?" And he tried to answer, "Boiling," but could get no answer through. Things were very tricky.

But before that when Caroline came, she was going to go with her parents to Peking, and I didn't even have my passport. It was very stupid to be anywhere without one's passport. And my parents were saying to try and get on a ship and come to Japan. They had been in touch with Cecil, but he couldn't contact me directly. But I got on this train, and decided to go up. But the trouble was I was nursing my baby and I just had to leave her - left her with the Japanese nurse - and Cecil went to meet the train and thought, "Well, thank God, Elsie's all right in Chinwangtao," and I got off the train and he was ready to kill me. He said. "You go right back," so I burst into tears, and the next day he sent me back, and it's lucky he did. Because communications were cut, and eventually I got on a coal freighter with the children and went to Japan.

Lï¿½VITT: But for a while you could only communicate with each other through Tokyo.

LYON: And I would keep going to the shipping office and saying "Do you have a boat?" and they would say, "We'll let you know when we do." And one day there was a funny, little tiny boat, way down in the water, the Katie Moller, and I went into the office and I said, "When are you going to have a boat?" "Oh, come to think of it, there's one leaving for Japan in four hours." So I had to go and try and help the servants to be left all right, so they could get back to Peking, and the Japanese nurse and the children and I packed as fast as we could, and we made it. And the Captain gave me his cabin, and I slept with our daughter, Alice, in his cabin, and the Japanese nurse on a very hard bench, and Lilla in her little basket.

But the trouble was that as I [was no longer nursing Lilla], she dropped from looking like an advertisement for Mellon's food, she just dwindled away because no formula would agree with her, and by the time we got her to Japan we were quite worried about her. But we got her there and she picked up all right, and we stayed there until wives were allowed to go back. The other wives were sent out. Some went to the Philippines, some went home. All the wives had to get out because they were having bombings, and so on in Peking.

Q: So you actually had left before the China Incident.

LYON: Yes, Marco Polo Bridge. June 6. And I used to hear troop trains going through all night. I would read "Gone With the Wind" and I wouldn't go to sleep until it was light because it was rather eerie. And I had the Japanese nurse and the Chinese servants, and one day a Japanese customs man, very drunk, came and terrorized the servants with a knife. We were off in the woods, I didn't know what might happen if the Japanese soldiers came. We weren't in the part of the beach that was patrolled, because I had got an extra big house in a better place because my parents were going to come and visit us that summer. But needless to say they couldn't come, but it meant that I wasn't where we would have been patrolled and looked after. We were quite off by ourselves, and General Stillwell's daughter had been staying with me, and they sent for her and said, "Come right back" to the Army camp four miles away. They weren't going to let her stay there. So that's where we were until we managed to get off. Never knowing quite what might happen. The Chinese coolie would sleep outside my door, not that he could have done much, and the Japanese nurse was at the other end with Alice, and I was with the baby at another end of the house. But then we made it to Japan.

Q: From there we go to Chile.

LYON: But meanwhile, what was Lilla doing?

Lï¿½VITT: We came back from Bern to Washington, as I told you, and then were sent to Sydney, Australia, when President Roosevelt felt that diplomats should have some consular training. And Sydney happened to be a very political post at that time [pre-World War II], and very important to have a diplomat there, and it worked out well for a year and a half. And I loved it. It was an outdoor kind of life with beaches, and lawn tennis and that kind of thing. And then Pierrepont went home and I took the children on a boat up to Japan to visit my parents. And we put in at all different ports, so it was a very interesting trip. I loved that trip. And no sooner did I arrive in Tokyo than my Mother said, "Elsie is ill. Alice is in the hospital with scarlet fever, and she hasn't got a good nurse, and I have engaged a Japanese nurse and you are to go right away with this nurse to Elsie. So I left my children - they had their nurse with them - and with this Japanese nurse, I traveled for three days and nights to Peking, all day by train, and then all night by ferry, then up through Korea to Manchuria and down, and so forth, and got to Peking.

LYON: I had a fever of 104ï¿½.

Lï¿½VITT: And the Japanese nurse took over, and the children began to get better. And I remember I was the one to take Alice to her doctor, and did all kind of things that were yours to do.

LYON: Because I was so ill.

Lï¿½VITT: Including a small part in a play.

Q: How were you able to do that. Could you read the lines?

Lï¿½VITT: Well, I didn't have many lines. It was Victoria Regina and Cecil had a main part in it, and I had a few lines.

LYON: When Alice got scarlet fever, you see it was pretty awful because with our family, my father having been left deaf, and my sister having died of it. And Cecil had gone off on a trip and had gone to visit Jim Penfield in Yunnanfu, and he was going to come back up the coast on a Chinese coastal steamer. And once he would have got off on that trip, there wouldn't have been a way of reaching him or of his being able to come in any way. So I thought I should let him know that Alice had scarlet fever. And Jim thought he was quite crazy (Jim was a bachelor then), when Cecil said, I'm going back," and Jim said, "You can't do that, you've got this trip you're looking forward to." And Cecil said, "I'm going." And he went to see if he could charter a plane and the Chinese told him exactly what it would cost to the last cent, but then they said we have no plane. So he got on a train and he came, which was wonderful. Because after taking Alice in and wanting to go and visit her, the rules were so strict I was only allowed (I was nursing Lilla, you see), and they wanted me to take every precaution, and they made me put on a surgeon's gown and a mask. And I stood in the doorway and Alice held out her arms to me, and I couldn't come any nearer, and so she would throw herself down on her bed crying and of course it would just cut me to pieces. So then when Cecil came home he would be the one to go visit her and I would have to stay home and look after Lilla. And I didn't try, but she had been exposed to so many languages - Japanese, Chinese, [a] Scotch nanny, when we left her with my Mother when we went home on leave, a Scotch Loch Ness Monster - and so she hadn't begun to talk, and after the four weeks in the hospital she was spouting Chinese, from the Chinese nurses, and she came home really talking. And wasn't that when you came?

Lï¿½VITT: That's when I came. When she got back from the hospital.

LYON: When she got back from the hospital or when she got back from Japan? She hadn't yet been to Japan, had she? No, she was still not very well.

Lï¿½VITT: Then I returned to Japan after a month in Peking, and my children had been very well cared for by my parents, and learned that Pierrepont had been... that they had reorganized the State Department, and instead of Western European and Eastern European divisions, they had one called the European Division, and that was what Pierrepont was to head. So he was to remain in Washington, and we were to go there.

LYON: So you never went back to Australia.

Lï¿½VITT: No, we had a year and a half, but we did not go back to Sydney. We had had to give up the house we had rented anyway, so we were all packed up. But we went straight back to Washington [from Japan]. But in those days it was 17 days by boat across the Pacific.

Q: This was my next question. You [Cabot] I think had 18 posts. There was no jet travel in those days. It seems to me that you spent an awful lot of your time getting from one place to another, packing up, getting settled.

Lï¿½VITT: I ought to tell you something about that. You would get exhausted with good-bye parties, and packing. And you would have a lovely five days on board ship, or more, that you really could rest. You could have all the rest you needed and, and then you had to come and immediately get settled, do your calls to the different people. So much was demanded of you right away but you at least were rested. Now you have all of the part of leaving, one flight, and all the part of arriving and you don't get the rest.

LYON: We went to Paris and we married our daughter Alice in Washington, and arrived in Paris and Mrs. Houghton the next night was going to give a dinner and dance in our honor, and...

Lï¿½VITT: As soon as I arrived in Sydney there was a reception in my honor, and I had to make a speech, and I didn't know one did have to make speeches. It was an Australian thing, and I was so young, and so shy, it was very difficult.

Q: Did you make it?

Lï¿½VITT: I said a few words. I wasn't prepared to make a speech, but you had to be ready when you arrived at a post for anything that...

Q: And of course you traveled with trunks, and mounds of luggage, children in no wash and wear.

LYON: We didn't have wash and wear

Q: Of course not.

Lï¿½VITT: That 19 day trip across to Sydney, Australia - the children were aged four and two - I spent much of my time ironing their clothes. So that they could have a fresh dress or fresh suit every day.

That was a lovely trip, the Monterey the ship was called.

Q: Yes, the Matson Lines.

Lï¿½VITT: They had special cabins with its own little lanai, or porch, and Pierrepont and I were given one, and another for the children. But there was no connecting door. They were side by side but you had to come out in the hall. And the lanai had no safety, it just had rails; the children could easily have slipped through those rails into the ocean and I not know. So the first day I took those children, aged four and two, no five and three they were. I took them and stood by the rail, and I said to them, "You must not put even one foot up on the rail. If you did you might fall through and fall into the water, and the boat would go away, and nobody would know, and you'd drown" and so forth. I made the most dramatic picture I could. "Don't put even one foot up on the rail." And then I was at peace the whole trip because all on the upper decks, anywhere, children could slip through.

LYON: I'm surprised that worked.

Lï¿½VITT: Then when we were about to leave, we took our karatani nurse, a very special kind of trained nurse for children that we had in Sydney. We were taking her home with us, and Peter, when the children knew that she was coming, they were so excited, and Peter, now aged five, said to her, "And nurse, you mustn't put even one foot up on the railing. You could fall through and you would fall into the water, and the ship would go on and leave you behind." And you know, she could no more - she was quite stout - she could no more have gone through those rails... But it fascinated me that the message got through so strongly that he was cautioning her a year and a half later.

LYON: Good, because I didn't manage to handle it that way when we were on our coal freighter going from China to Japan. There were just chains, and Alice was two and a half, and I put her on reins, and she was so insulted, and she cried and cried, and wouldn't leave her cabin. And I said, "Alice, darling, I cannot take you up on deck without them." And the whole first day she just cried and cried and was deeply insulted. But she had to; I couldn't... There was one chain around to keep one from falling in.

I was also going to reminisce on another trip. When I went to Japan to have Alice I went five days on a boat with no doctor. And a friend, a Navy wife, was with me, but thank goodness Alice didn't start, and when I got there we found she had to be a caesarean, so it is just as well nothing had happened. But we made it. And then when she was born and I went back, I went by train through Manchuria, as Lilla did, and it was quite a trip. And Cecil sent the Chinese Number One Boy to meet me in Dairen, and all he did was to check the kori basket that Alice was supposed to sleep in with all her diapers, everything I needed. He checked it, so I couldn't get to it until we got to Peking. His only contribution. When we talk of these boat trips, we had our ups and downs, I would say. I was also going to say that now, with this jet travel, you might not have the rest between posts, but then for instance, when my Mother died, I was able to fly home to her. Now in the early days, in the Service, you couldn't just rush to somebody. Now we could, we could get on a plane and be there in a few hours. I prefer the jet travel to the slow boat, but Cecil yearns for the slow boat.

Q: Now, you were coming back from Sydney, I believe.

Lï¿½VITT: Yes, and then we had three years in Washington, and then Pierrepont was made Minister, as it was then, to Canada, and three years after that, he died quite suddenly, and I returned [to the United States] and that was the end of my diplomatic career.

CABOT: I think something that might be of interest to the Service is how simple our Embassy organizations were, you know in our first few, in my first year, my husband was the only Secretary in a big Embassy. In these other embassies where you were, there were never more than one or two Secretaries.

Lï¿½VITT: That's right, there were two in Bern

CABOT: And there would usually be a good Consul General who generally had been there for years. There would be a very small staff, very able, helping women who were permanent. Miss Carp, for example in Turkey, who was famous for generations of Foreign Service.

Q: And they were Department of State employees?

CABOT: Yes, who stayed put. And therefore, as you see, it was a very different story. You did not have a group of people to help you run an Embassy. You had to go out and meet people by yourselves, and make most of the contacts in each of these places. That affected very much your life.

Q: My husband still thinks that having to go out and find your own place to live was very valuable to us in several posts.

LYON: Oh, in Chile we had so many houses. We moved again and again and again.

Q: Now why was that?

LYON: Well, we would rent a house and we couldn't keep it. We had five houses. We were in the Hotel Crillon for a month. And then we took a house on Parque Forrestal for a month. Then we got a house we were able to get because someone was going away to Europe for part of a year, and we moved in. It was a lovely house, much too big for us and rather pretentious, but very comfortable. Then we had to move out of that and so it went: we always had to move from house to house.

Q: I remember being impressed with the number of moves Caroline Service made.

LYON: Incredible!

Q: The thought of packing up every few months. What did you have? A two or three year...

LYON: But my Mother gave us a good piece of advice. She said, "When you take a place, feel that you are going to be there for years. Settle in as if you were, even if you take a house for six months. Get out your bibelots, your pictures, make it yours, and really feel settled, and do it right away.

Q: The old days with the small embassies, we had a built in support system.

LYON: Well, I was just going to say, people like Miss Carp helped the wheels go round.

CABOT: Over 20 years, this woman in Turkey.

LYON: I used to feel sorry for young wives arriving in Paris, such a huge Embassy, and maybe their first time abroad.

CABOT: It was too impersonal, too big. There were lost young women. Going into a very small post and being trained with what might hit you made them much stronger when they got into the bigger posts.

Q: Imagine what it is like now.

LYON: So big.

Q: Now we have this enormous administrative device to ease people into the Service. Well it is impersonal, it is not the same.

LYON: Oh, it has changed a lot. At the time of my father, there was a group of people who were like a happy family. They all knew each other well and they were all career.

Q: Your father was there for the 1921 reorganization, which - I don't know much about it, but it ...

LYON: It was the Rogers Act.

CABOT: It was the birth [of the modern Foreign Service].

Q: And then he [Joseph Grew] left just at the time of the 1946...

LYON: After the War, yes. A very interesting span, and he was always tremendously interested in his daughters' careers. We all exchanged diaries, which is a dangerous thing to do apparently, but he would always send us all copies of his diaries, and Pierrepont kept a diary and...

Lï¿½VITT: And now both my father's and Pierrepont's diaries which are at Houghton Library [at Harvard] are much used. People who write consult those diaries all the time.

LYON: I always kept a diary, and Cecil did for a while, but then he didn't dare any more after the McCarthy period.

Q: Where are your personal diaries? [to Lï¿½vitt]

Lï¿½VITT: Mine are in the form of letters; I used to write every week to my parents, a diary letter.

Q: And you have those?

Lï¿½VITT: Yes

LYON: When you come to Hancock, I can show you. Lilla's returned to me letters I wrote my father, typewritten letters, but for the first few years I kept a diary and then Cecil had them bound, but I don't think they are worth much, except perhaps for the description of Jack Kennedy's trip to Paris. That was fun, describing that, and things like that, those memories.

Q: Your papers will perhaps have much more value [a hundred years from now]...

CABOT: To people who don't know the period.

Q: To people who are really looking back on this as we look back on Abigail Adams.

LYON: Well, when you come to Hancock, I can show you what we have. And Cecil has some of his diaries, but then as I say, he got scared. He decided to stop keeping a diary.

Q: My husband was held up coming into the Foreign Service because of the McCarthy...

CABOT, LYON, Lï¿½VITT: Oh, terrible.

Q: He took the exam in '51 or '52 or something like that, and didn't get in until 1956.

Lï¿½VITT: He is in the Foreign Service?

Q: He was; he just retired in the fall of 1985.

[Cecil Lyon enters the room.]

Q: We had just gotten to the McCarthy years.

CLYON: I am not going to stay.

LYON: I said you stopped keeping a diary, because of the McCarthy period.

CLYON: That's right. You know why. Somebody, Edmund Clubb, I noticed they had made him produce his diary in the McCarthy business; he had indicated that he had met certain leftist leaders, which we all thought we should.

CABOT: Why not? Part of his job.

Q: Just doing what any good young Foreign Service Officer would do.

CABOT: You hear of it [McCarthyism] even today.

Q: Oh, yes. It's the cause celebre of the 20th century, of our Service.

LYON: Did you meet Jack Service? He and Caroline were such a wonderful FSO couple. His knowledge of China, the Chinese and the language couldn't be surpassed.

Q: Yes, he is the most vital, attractive man his age that I have met in years.

LYON: He and the Clubbs are dear friends, and they did such a good job, and they got so little representational allowance, and they had so little money, and they spent every penny entertaining. Marianne would cook the most wonderful meals for these Chinese - they had more Chinese friends than anyone - and that's what you're meant to do. No, that period was awful when we saw our friends going down like nine pins. Terrible.

John Davies was also a sacrificial lamb. They did a wonderful job.

Q: They did a wonderful job of reporting.

CABOT: It was part of the job. That was McCarthy's evil.

Q: Well, it was also Senator [Wm.] Knowland from California, from the Oakland Tribune, and of course he had the paper as a mouthpiece for his lascivious purpose.

CABOT: It was a terrible period.

LYON: I remember watching the McCarthy hearings. I thought it can't be that in our country we are going through something like that. It was so awful. The McCarthy period.

CLYON: Mayor Reuter, who was the mayor of Berlin, said, "You Americans are lacking in civic duty." This from a German. Of course he had stood up against Hitler and he had been arrested and everything, but still it was rather hard to take.

Q: Could we go back to that dreadful McCarthy period? As I said, we came in right after that, and it held my husband up for over three years.

CABOT: We finally emerged from it

Q: That was my next question. How long did it take.

CABOT: It took a long time.

LYON: It took a toll of many friends.

CABOT: It destroyed a number of friends who McCarthy had never seen, didn't give a hoot about, but they were names to him and he would say in public, "Now, look at this man in Rome. He is one of those." No proof, and he went after people who in any way could be damaged.

Q: Did he believe this, or was he just playing politics.

CABOT: Politics.

LYON: He was just an evil man. Took some of the finest people in our Service. Take John Davies. He was a brilliant officer; he had a fantastic mind. We had known him since he was a language student with Jack and Jim Penfield in Peking. He was invaluable to the government. He and his wonderful wife.

CABOT: You know there are periods. Periods like the witch hunters in Salem. Periods in France in the middle of Provence, in the middle of the 13th century, there was a similar madness. The Inquisition was another terribly cruel period. And this was a period when Americans were willing to believe. And it took so long to stand up to them.

LYON: Yes, it destroyed initiative.

CABOT: I don't know why the State Department didn't have more courage. This is one of the things in my old age I would like to question. Why the heads of State...

LYON: They are always scared of Congress.

Q: They shouldn't be, but that's where their funding comes from. That's where their livelihood comes from. My husband says the same thing: the State Department has caved again on an issue.

CABOT: Well, they are supposed to represent the people, the State Department, but on the other hand they are supposed to represent the best part of the people and not merely the weak.

Q: You know, the Foreign Service has no constituency.

CABOT: I can remember my husband having to go to the Foreign Relations Committee. One of his assistants at that time was Tapley Bennett, and he came to Jack and said I would like to go to the Democratic Convention and see how the Americans run it. He had been abroad with us. And Jack said, "I want you to go. That's a good idea." Jack was Assistant Secretary at that time, and Tap was his under man, running all over Latin America. And a little bit later Tap came up for his confirmation for his first ministership, and the old boys in the Senate, Republican boys, in control, said, "This man certainly cannot be made an ambassador. We have it on record that he went to the Democratic Convention." And Jack went to the Foreign Relations Committee and he said, "I simply want to tell you he went on my personal recommendation. This is a very competent man; he well deserves his first ambassadorship, and I think you should take it into consideration and give it to him." And they did, but we had to go and say so.

Q: Give an excuse for going to a Democratic Convention.

CABOT: At that time, you see, the Republicans were powerful. Think of Mr. Helms now, the fun he would have trying to trace who goes where. I forget which was the Senator in charge at that time, who was equally powerful and narrow minded.

LYON: Is all of this going to be all right to be in the records?

CABOT: That is perfectly correct. That is in Jack's record.

LYON: Well, it is?

Q: Let me tell you what we do. All of my instructors have always said, "Never turn the tape recorder off." But what we will do is put bands around the tapes and say, "Restricted until such and such a date."

LYON: I can say right now, I think, anything about the McCarthy period and friends.

CABOT: It would be perfectly shocking if we couldn't discuss the McCarthy period today.

Q: I think it should be put down.

LYON: Do you [Cabot] think it's all right?

CABOT: I think it would be shocking if we were not allowed to, or should not wish to. It was a very bad period, which we hope will never be reenacted.

LYON: And you think it may be very salutary to have it go down in the record?

CABOT: To know it existed and what it did.

Q: Yes, it certainly should be preserved for history. If for no other reason to have some young man coming into the Foreign Service, because it could happen again, as you pointed out, the Inquisition. These young men were doing their job, and they were doing a very good job and they were persecuted. That should be in the record.

LYON: A much better job than many people who didn't do much and got by.

CABOT: What we are anxious for is to strengthen and support the Service men, so they shall be honest reporters. That is the strength of the Foreign Service. Not to be political. And our bosses unfortunately have not been other than politicians for the last few years. And therefore it has had a tremendous reflection; there has been no protector in the Foreign Service.

Q: And the fact that people don't know one another. It's just seen in writing, it's a name with no face connected, no knowledge of his reputation as an officer. The size of the Service has something to do with that. We will never get back to this ideal Service where everyone knew everyone else.

CABOT: No, and where you trained them.

Q: Where people were trained, where there was a personal contact.

CABOT: But in part it must return. It is essential that it return. And this is what you [Fenzi] are trying to do, to build up [a record].

Second interview date: August 20, 1987

LYON: We were told to go just as fast as we could. We weren't even to take any home leave. We couldn't get any summer clothes, because they were only selling fall clothes in the States and we knew we were going into summer. But we set off by boat and we arrived. A couple named Trueblood, who was stationed in Santiago, came to meet us and said, "Well, we didn't expect you so soon. Why did you hurry so?"

Q: Oh, dear. [laughs]

LYON: [laughs] But we loved Chile from the word start and we made many good friends there. It was a beautiful country.

Q: And then you went back?

LYON:Thirteen years later as Ambassador.

Q: That must have been an interesting experience.

LYON: But what was most interesting, most fun really, was being there as young secretaries, because those were the days when we didn't take ourselves or our lives too seriously. To go back as Ambassador was really rather odd.

Q: Well, you had more responsibilities.

LYON: Yes, and calls on all the twenty-one wives of Latin American embassies there before we even got settled. It was a busy, busy time.

Q: So you really had more fun...

LYON: ...much more fun the first time.

Q: ...as young officers, yes.

LYON: Just after we got there, they were holding elections. Gustavo Ross was running as Conservative President, and Pedro Aguirre Cerda as Popular Front, and no one thought that he would get in, but he did. They called him "Don Tinto." He got in, and that was when the Popular Front came in. Most of our friends had been those who were for the Conservatives - for Gustavo Ross.

Q: Yes.

LYON: Many things changed...

Q: ...because in the Foreign Service you usually deal with the Establishment...

LYON: Yes.

Q: ...in the country, yes. And so he was really the Opposition candidate?

LYON: Yes, but he was very interesting; and then Don Aguirre Cerda came in, and we were there at that time, which was a very interesting time. And then came our coming into the War. We had a Japanese nurse for the children, whom we just loved - dear little Kyosan. We felt we had to put it to her that if she wanted to go back to Japan... Because I had to tell her, "If Japan were to join the Axis, we would not be able to keep you." I said, "You could go to a Chilean family, but you couldn't stay with us." She was very young and she thought about it very carefully and decided to go back. And that was very sad. The day that I had to drive her down into Valpariso, put her on a Japanese boat to go home, I was very sad. The children adored her. It was very hard, but later, when Japan did, and we came into the War, I was so thankful that we had sent Kyosan home so that she was safe in her own country.

Q: And did you keep in touch with her afterwards?

LYON: Years later, our daughter, Alice, went back to Japan with her husband and looked her up. She was such a darling. We loved Kyosan very much. And then, we stayed in Chile until 1943.

Q: Yes, and then went back to Washington?

LYON: And then went back to Washington. And the sad thing was (it shows one never knows), that when I had taken my mother up to Washington, when my parents arrived on the Gripsholm from Japan then, I met the ship in Rio and brought my mother to Chile to visit us for a little while and my father went straight home. Then I went home briefly to accompany my mother, because she was not too well after being interned for several months in the Embassy in Japan, and I flew with her. [On June 25, 1942, in a diplomatic exchange, Ambassador and Mrs. Grew and his staff, who had been interned in the Embassy compound in Tokyo at the onset of World War II (December 7, 1941), sailed a circuitous route on a Japanese ship to Lourenï¿½o Marques, Mozambique, where they were transferred to the Gripsholm. Japanese diplomats who had left the U.S. on the Gripsholm were simultaneously transferred to the Japanese ship.]

In those days, it was a four-day flight, because there were no airfields in South America where you could land after dark, so you did it in four stages. I took my mother up, and my sister, Lilla, said, "Oh, do come and visit us in Ottawa." I thought back, had I known that Pierrepont [Lilla Moffat's husband, Pierrepont Moffat] was going to die, I'd have so loved to have gone and visited them. And I said, "Well, another time I'll come, but now I'd better just stay with my parents in Washington." And then I went back in 1943. Alas, we got word that Pierrepont had died in January of 1943, in Ottawa. And then, we were sent back to Washington.

Q: Division of West Coast Affairs?

LYON: Yes, ah yes, for Latin America...

Q: Latin America...the West Coast of Latin America?

LYON: Yes, and we were there not too long. Cecil was always sticking his neck out [static on tape], and when Kippy Tuck [Somerville Pinkney Tuck, Jr. was Minister (1944) and later Ambassador (1946-48) to Egypt.], who were friends, of whom we were very fond, was assigned as Minister to Egypt, Cecil said, "If you need a 'soffrogi', send for me."

Q: And he did.

LYON: And Kippy took him literally and asked for him to go to Egypt. That's the one post where I was not very happy. The only post that we've had in the Foreign Service that I wasn't...

Q: But you were there during World War II...

LYON: ...healthwise...

Q: ...those incredible years.

LYON: It was very bad, because I got amoebic dysentery very badly and actually never got over that completely. Apparently, I got the kind that destroys the liver, and that really stayed with me the rest of our career. And also, the heat was terrible. We were in a southern exposure apartment. It was almost impossible to find an apartment, and the walls were very thin, and of course, no one thought of air conditioning in those days. It really was very, very uncomfortable.

Q: Well, and I would think also that having the War going on, your...

LYON: No, we got there after the War, the children and I. Cecil went ahead in 1944 and we were to join him on a Portuguese ship. It was all arranged, and we had reservations. Freddie Lyon, who is an old friend of ours, went to my father, who was then Under Secretary of State, and he said, "I've been unable to sleep at night and I'll tell you why. It worries me having Elsie as your daughter and her children traveling on a Portuguese ship, because they have had cases of the Portuguese ships being stopped and hostages taken off." So Daddy told me and said he'd put it to me. And I said, "Well, maybe we'd better not then." But I was not allowed to tell one soul. I was able to send one letter to Cecil by courier, but he couldn't tell anyone, and no one knew.

All thought I was a bad sport and didn't want the discomfort of a Portuguese ship. I was going with other friends, who were traveling to other posts in Europe, and I could never tell anyone.

Then, later, we went by convoy. We had to wait for a convoy, and when we sailed, it was May 10th, two days after VE Day. But it was a Norwegian freighter. It was a wonderful trip, but the Captain said that because of the fact that a lot of the U-boats would not have had the orders that the War was over, we still had to travel as if in wartime conditions. So we had the blackouts, and two days out, we dropped depth charges. We had all the excitement of traveling in wartime conditions.

And then, Alice got an earache, and we had to get a doctor to come over on one of the Navy escort ships. He came in a boatswain chair and looked at her ear and prescribed for her. And Lilla had started off with whooping cough. But the best to do for whooping cough is to take a sea trip. So that was very good.

Q: Oh, my goodness. Really, the conditions under which your children were...

LYON: Oh, no, it was fun. I enjoyed that ship enormously. Really I did. I've written it up. The Captain was so dear, and the stewardess, and we only had seven passengers. It was an experience that I really enjoyed. I mean, at times it was scary, but we got there all right.

Q: And had your time in Cairo? What? About..?

LYON: It wasn't very long.

Q: It wasn't very long, no, because in 1946, Cecil came back to the Department and the River Plate Affairs.

LYON: Yes, he did, and Ellis Briggs [Ellis O. Briggs, Ambassador to eight countries (1944-62): Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Czechoslovakia, Korea, Peru, Brazil, Greece, and Spain], he would have been in Washington, which we enjoyed very much. We were good friends.

Q: And then, from then? To Warsaw?

LYON: To Warsaw, and that was very interesting. We found that very, very interesting. We were there two years: 1948 to 1950.

And it was very hard to see what people suffered behind the Iron Curtain. We had to be terribly careful everywhere, every minute.

The only place we felt free to talk was when we took a picnic in the middle of a field. If we went to a forest, we thought somebody might be lurking behind a tree or something. You have that funny feeling. Then when you get out, it's so strange. I'd be traveling on a train and I'd look behind me before I'd talk to see who might be sitting behind me, because you got so used to being careful.

Q: You know we can talk amusedly about that now, but didn't...

LYON: It's a strain.

Q: It's a strain, because you have to be very careful...

LYON: Very careful. Mary Chapin said when she saw us in Paris on the way in - she was in Hungary, Budapest, with Selden Chapin - she said, "Don't try to stay longer than three months at a time." And I thought, My goodness, three months! after having had five years in China, five years in Chile, and not worrying about whether you got out. She said, "You've got to try and get out every three months." Well, at one point, Cecil had been seven months at a stretch [in Warsaw] and he went to see me off on the Embassy plane. When we got to the airport, got me to the airport, they said, "We have no record. You have to ask for permission to have certain passengers on the Embassy plane." They said, "We have no record of your wife going out." So Cecil went to telephone and he came back. I had disappeared and my bags had disappeared, because they made me go through. You go into a waiting room and just sit there until they tell you to get on the plane. He really got a little frantic. Then he saw a Black Maria driving away, and he said it was sort of...having been there for seven months...that he got frantic.

Q: ...thinking that something had happened to you?

LYON: ...that something had happened to me, yes. But it was sort of a frame of mind that you get in. And then, when you get out...

We had our children in boarding school in Switzerland, and we first left Alice at home in boarding school in Peterborough, New Hampshire - Kendall Hall - then she came out on the Batoria, a Polish ship, with a great friend who had been my Latin teacher at Holton Arms School: Helen Sherman. She brought her to me.

I met them in London. And then, the next winter, Lilla and she were both in school in Lausanne. Lilla had been the first winter, and then we were assigned...

Q: ...so you were a bit closer.

LYON: ...closer.

Q: So you got out to see them.

LYON: We could get out to see them and we could call them on the telephone. And when Alice came over, she said, "I want to go right back to the States. I do not want to stay here." And so, I felt that it was hard on her. Then, when word came that we were going to the War College, I got Cecil's permission to call up the children and tell them. And I called and I said, "Alice, "I've got some wonderful news for you. We've been assigned back to Washington. "Ohhhhh, I don't want to go. I like it here." [laughs]

So then, we went back to the War College. And then, of course, they loved it all over again, being home. Then we all went to Berlin, which we all four enjoyed and found intensely interesting. As McCloy [U.S. Military Governor and High Commissioner for Germany (1949-52)] said at that time, "It's a windy corner." It is very interesting. We had a lot of tense moments. We served under a wonderful General - Lemuel Matthewson. They were wonderful friends, the Matthewsons. And then, later, General Timberman. Cecil was the Deputy and Head of HICOG [High Commissioners in Germany]. The children loved the American school, but then they had to come home to Milton Academy and Bennington College for Alice. That was when Lilla [Mrs. Lyon's sister] stepped into the breach. She'd been visiting in Europe and she was bringing Peter home, and she brought our children home too.

Q: Just Lilla.

LYON: Lilla. That was it. I'm trying to think...

Q: ...from Genoa.

LYON: ...from Genoa. I'm trying to think how Alice...how it worked. I can't at the moment remember. I know they both left us at once, and I was bereft. Could it have been another time that she took Lilla? [her daughter, Lilla Lyon] It may have. I think Alice came and stayed in Berlin for awhile. That was it. It was when Lilla went back to Milton Academy that she [Lilla Moffat] took them, but the first time, I think we just sent them or took them or something. [laughs] But all of a sudden, we found ourselves with no children in the house.

Q: But those days in Berlin...was it after the War?

LYON: Yes, but you had to be airlifted in. We never did drive through the Russian zone, but while we were there, we got special permission for the Spencer Barnes, the children and myself, and a Polish-speaking clerk, Irene Boski, to drive through the Russian zone to the Bayreuth [music] Festival, and it was very interesting. There were almost no cars, except the car that followed us, but then, when we got to the check point where we were supposed to be checked, there was a detour. We went into the wrong check point. Then they came out and glowered at us, and Xenia Barnes, who was White Russian, said, "Don't get out of the car!" So, we stuck it out and stayed in the car. Eventually, things were straightened out and we could go on. We got to Bayreuth and had a wonderful time.

Q: I was in Berlin just briefly. It would have been 1973, and the people at the Embassy did have a feeling of isolation.

LYON: Oh, you do.

Q: Did you? You must have had that too. We could drive in and out at will then. I drove in, and...

LYON: ...and no problem?

Q: ...no problem. We were just told, as your White Russian friend said, "Don't get out of the car and don't leave the main road."

LYON: That's right. Don't do anything.

Q: Keep going.

LYON: And you didn't run into any trouble?

Q: No, none whatsoever.

LYON: My father had been Head of Radio Free Europe and he became Head of Radio Free Europe while we were in Warsaw. We saw it and our embassy bulletin, and I said to Cecil, "How could my father do that to me? Here we are in Warsaw, and he's become Head of Radio Free Europe. And then, when we were going to Berlin...

Q: Do you think that made you more suspect?

LYON: I don't know. I thought it might. Then he walked over to see me when we came through. We were going to Berlin, and he was worried about it. And I said, "All right, Daddy, I promise you I won't go into East Berlin." But later, he released me from that promise, and I did go, but I took no pleasure in it. We went to an opera one night in East Berlin, and the difference from West Berlin and East Berlin....

Q: Extraordinary.

LYON: Didn't you find that?

Q: Yes, and I was very uncomfortable when I was there.

LYON: Very uncomfortable. The atmosphere was awful. I just didn't want to go again. I went that once, and, of course, wonderful opera, wonderful voices, but a very eerie feeling, oh, yes.

Q: Before the Wall [the Berlin Wall], did you have to go through a checkpoint to go on?

LYON: Ah, yes, a checkpoint. And you had to be very careful. I think you had to ask if it was all right, to get permission.

Q: Yes, because, when we went, we were told we had to go in an Embassy car. You couldn't go in an ordinary vehicle.

LYON: Yes.

Q: Windows rolled up. Show only...you opened your passport to the page with your picture, and that was it. Nothing more.

LYON: And no discussion.

Q: No discussion, no.

LYON: And they let you through all right?

Q: They let us through, because we had an Embassy driver.

LYON: Yes.

Q: And we were with an officer who went over two or three times a week to buy the latest publications.

LYON: Oh, I see.

Q: We had no mission then there, and this was...

LYON: It was before the East German mission?

Q: It was before they opened the Embassy in East Berlin, and it was to pick up the latest publications to find out what was going on in East Germany at that time.

LYON: Later, I know that they then had a mission there. A friend of ours who had been in Warsaw...oh, what is his name? We see them still. They're such dear friends. Bastek...John Bastek was there in the mission in East Germany, and we were in Berlin at the time of the uprising on June 17th. Then they thought Eleanor Dulles was in back of it. She was staying with us there at the time, but, needless to say, she was not. But it was very tense then. They thought it might be the start of World War III.

In 1970, the large houses were still boarded up?

Q: Many of them throughout the suburbs. Those people were lost and apparently there was no way of tracing who the houses belonged to, and there they were. That was...well, that was almost thirty years later.

LYON: All of them still boarded up. Oh, the poor things. We went back to Berlin. We were invited...well...Cecil was invited for the 25th Anniversary of Mayor Reuther's death, and Mayor Reuther had been such a good friend when we were stationed there from 1951 to 1954. What happened was that I wanted so much to go along, and he asked if I might come along, but totally unofficially. They were so nice, the German Government. Many people they invited couldn't come, so they said, "All right, we'll make Mrs. Lyon unofficial." So I did go back and join in all the ceremonies. It was wonderful to be back again and with our British colleague, Michael Rose, and our French colleague, Christian d'Marjery. We had a wonderful reunion then. We really loved Mayor Reuther deeply. We were very thrilled to come back and renew these ties.

Q: Cecil mentioned him briefly at... Remember when he passed through when we were talking [in Washington]...?

LYON: Yes, oh, when he said, "You can charm apples off trees?"

Q: No, it was more. I think he was referring to Watergate.

LYON: Ohhhh.

Q: Reuther said how could that happen in your country?

LYON: Well, I know that at one point Mayor Reuther had made himself rather unpopular just as he was going to go to a visit in the States. It was given to Cecil to, so to speak, tip him off. And so Cecil said, "Mayor Reuther, you know that you can charm birds out of trees. Why don't you...?" It had to do with flying the planes for the refugees, because we had arranged an airlift to get refugees out. But they were piling up, because we didn't have the necessary red tape to get them out. It was getting to be quite a situation. There were these planes all tied up, and it was up to Mayor Reuther to speed things along. Anyway, Cecil talked to him before his visit, and he said, "You know if you haven't managed to straighten this out. When you get to the States, they're not going to be very happy." He smiled at Cecil and said, "When I get to Washington, I will charm the apples off the trees." [laughs]

Q: [laughs] So, after Berlin, you came...back...

LYON: ...back to Washington again.

Q: And that was for Inter-American Affairs?

LYON: That was German Affairs. Yes, we were in German Affairs, I think, at that time, 1954-55? Maybe Cecil was transferred to - I know that he worked under Holland [Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Henry Finch Holland], and that's how we went to Chile. Now, I should be up on this as to when we were in German Affairs. I should get Cecil to tell me. Otherwise, when would we have been in German Affairs? From Poland, it was War College, then Berlin, then in 1954 we came home and were in German Affairs for a while. And then, we were transferred to...

Q: ...to Inter-American Affairs.

LYON: Yes and then Henry Holland was Cecil's boss and sent him to Chile as Ambassador. I can't remember exactly what date that took place, but I do know we were in German Affairs first.

Q: But I think your comment earlier about your really happier tour in Santiago as a young officer's wife is interesting. Several years ago, AAFSW did a study on the spouse in the Foreign Service - Did you ever see that? [Reference is to the 1985 AAFSW Forum Report entitled The Role of the Spouse in the Foreign Service.]

LYON: Nooo. I'd like to.

Q: Could you guess who the unhappiest women were?

LYON: The higher up they were.

Q: Absolutely.

LYON: You know why? I think Lilla will agree. When you're the wife of the Chief of Mission, you've got to be so careful. You can't have close ties with people in the Embassy or you're playing favorites.

Q: You're cut off in a way, aren't you?

LYON: You're rather isolated.

Q: And you have all the responsibilities.

LYON: Yes.

Q: If you accept them, which I know you did.

LYON: I enjoyed it more in Ceylon. It was a more relaxed place, but in Chile, it was our first ambassadorial post and it was hard work. [laughs] Hard work, I say, because it was so social. Suddenly, one finds that there's a lot of responsibility and one makes a lot of mistakes.

Q: You're constantly on display.

LYON: Goldfish bowl.

Q: Goldfish bowl, we've always said.

LYON: I don't like to look back on that period, because I seem to see glaring mistakes. Then, also, my health went down there and I had to come home and stay awhile. I couldn't finish the job there. I felt badly about that. I wasn't able to. I did go back and join Cecil again, but my health was so precarious that it was very difficult. This all goes back to those amoebic beasties that I must have picked up in Cairo. So, then, when we were transferred to Paris, that seemed to make a change, to make a fresh start. Although Paris was very social, it is near Switzerland. Every three months, I'd be like a clock. I'd wind down in Paris and go back to Switzerland and be rewound and then come back again. I must say, the health problem remained in Paris, which was unfortunate, but somehow Europe was a little easier. I'd had a lot of my childhood years in Europe.

Q: You were more at home there.

LYON: Yes. We loved Paris. We had Ceylon before retirement and I'd have loved to stay there longer. I loved the life in Ceylon. We were very happy there. It was a pleasant, relaxed job. We were lucky to have it, so it didn't make me feel that being an ambassador's wife was all thorns, no roses. We had a wonderful staff there, made very good friends, and it was a beautiful country. And when we had to get out, Cecil hated to retire. Hated it. He was miserable. He's still miserable at the age of 83.

Q: And he looks very happy for someone who's miserable. [laughs]

LYON: He's miserable, but he puts on a show. He so loved the Foreign Service. It was very hard for him to get out.

Q: How was your father, speaking of someone who loved the Foreign Service?

LYON: I don't think he minded. He was in for so many years. But my father was very philosophical and he just took it. He had a wonderful philosophy of life. He was very philosophical.

Q: And Cecil would have liked to stay on?

LYON: Well, he really couldn't, you see. We came back from Ceylon, and he didn't even have a desk in the Department for awhile. Many people went through that sort of period.

Q: Oh, they still are. They still are. I mean, that's nothing unusual at all.

LYON: Yes. And so, he had no job and no niche. They finally said they could send him out as an inspector. They sent him out to inspect eleven countries in Africa. That was very interesting and gave him a chance to see many countries. I went down to West Africa with him for the first four posts, but from Chad I came home, because he was going to have to stay in hotels.

With my horrible health problems, I went back to France and waited for him there. But he visited all eleven countries. I went with him to Togo, to Dahomey [Benin], Ivory Coast, and Chad, and enjoyed them enormously.

Later, Peter [Ambassador Peter Moffat, her nephew, son of her sister, Lilla] went to Chad as Ambassador. So, to have known Chad...

Q: ...to have known where they were...

LYON: Yes.

Q: Yes. So, he was inspecting the French-speaking countries?

LYON: Yes. Eleven countries he went to, and then, in Tanzania; he met.... [End of tape.]

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Elsie Grew Lyon, Mrs. Cecil B. Lyon, is reading from her diary, a letter to her father, Joseph C. Grew, describing the visit of the President and Mrs. Kennedy to Paris in 1961.

LYON: Diary Letters from Paris to Daddy, 1961, including President Kennedy's visit to Paris. Oh, Dear! [Discussion follows about locating correct letter]. May 31, 1961...Wednesday, May 31st.

"The only lady scheduled to meet the Kennedys' plane was Mrs. Gavin [wife of the Ambassador to France], so, although Cecil of course went, I took myself to the hairdresser instead." Then I write a few details about our life, other things that were happening, because there was always a lot going on.

"We were lucky enough to be included in the 'intime' luncheon at the Elysï¿½e [Palace in Paris on the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honore. Built in the 18th Century and once the property of Mme de Pompadour, it is now the residence of the presidents of France] and were very touched that the French had put us on the list. They are very good to us. I started very early indeed to meet Cecil at the Embassy. The streets and bridges were decked with French and American flags. At the Rue d'Elysï¿½e, there was a tribune with flags and buntings, and at the Place de la Concorde [a large square in Paris], there were the most enormous flags you've ever seen.

"After the lunch, I got some wonderful pictures in color of them with the fountains playing in the foreground. They looked so lovely waving together, far better than the French and Belgian, which had been there the week before for the King of the Belgians and Fabiola visit. When I tried to step out of the elevator to go to Cecil's office, I was stopped by a Marine." Compared with what you're stopped at now, it's like Alcatraz. [laughs]. "They were all over the place, and one was supposed to have a special pass. Cecil's secretary had to escort me down the hall to Cecil's temporary office, his having been vacated for [Secretary of State] Dean Rusk.

"We got to the lunch early and gathered with the other guests in one of the salons. The 'dejeunï¿½ intime' consisted of forty people, but as so many of the men, who had come with Kennedy, were without their wives, I was placed very high, being next but one to Jackie, with the Prime Minister Debrï¿½, who was a good friend of ours, between us. On my other side was Alphand, the French Ambasador to Washington.

"Chip Bohlen, Foy Kohler, and Bob McBride and all the former DCMs [deputy chiefs of mission] of 10 Avenue Emile de Chanel, that was our house, were present. It was a lovely warm sunny day, and there were many people waiting to see the Kennedys drive up through the garden, which brings one straight across the Champs-Elysï¿½es [avenue of Paris, leading from the Place de la Concorde to the Arc de Triomphe] and into the lovely garden of the Elysï¿½e, whereas the other guests go around through the Faubourg St. Honorï¿½ entrance.

"As soon as the de Gaulles and Kennedys were lined up, we were allowed to file through and shake their hands. Jackie looked very lovely in a pale yellow suit and yellow pillbox straw hat and lovely jewels. She has a most winning smile. I'd forgotten that she was as tall as she is. She is apparently one meter sixty-five and weighs sixty kilos - my present weight! I was so proud of her.

"At lunch, she was talking such beautiful French with de Gaulle, and what a pleasure it must have been to have someone like her beside him - someone with intelligence and 'esprit' and fluent, in fact, beautiful French. Two interpreters were placed, one between de Gaulle and Mrs. Gavin on de Gaulle's left, and one between Madame de Gaulle and President Kennedy.

"The American interpreter is young Sedgwick, nephew of Ellery [Sedgwick]. He is very good, but the French have been very critical of the interpreters in this visit on both sides and with reason. They said Dick Walters always caught the nuances and neither of these did. But imagine having to take notes as the speaker goes along and then reproduce it in flawless French as Sedgwick does. He never can do it in advance as Kennedy changes his speeches as he delivers them and never sticks to a prepared text.

"He speaks very well. At the lunch that day, he brought forth the one about the optimist saying they were learning Russian and the pessimist Chinese. He said he believed the optimist should learn English and French.

"After lunch, de Gaulle presented Jackie with a beautiful golden 'mignon d'heure', and she looked starry-eyed like a child opening a birthday present. He also gave a beautiful Louis XVI commode to the President. All the members of the White House party got presents, I believe. Foy and Chip received beautiful briefcases from Hermes, but Bob McBride's present was the only one that made me envious. That was a framed photograph of de Gaulle with the nicest possible message in his own handwriting."

Then I go back to our personal lives, which did not include any more of the Kennedy visit.

Q: But what a marvelous description.

LYON: Well, thank you.

Q: Oh, it's just beautifully done.

LYON: Well, thank you for your patience. You know, I'd forgotten.

That's why I had to read it. I'd forgotten. It broke my heart that Dotty's [Kidder, wife of the Political Counselor] telephone was out of order. [Mrs. Kidder was incommunicado and could not be advised that she was invited to the dinner for the Kennedys in Versailles.]

Q: ...out of order?

LYON: Oh, I can't stand it. When you meet her, you tell her. I'm still weeping.

Q: What a thing for her to miss!

LYON: Because she's so interested in Versailles and so interested ....

Q: What was Randolph Kidder doing? Did he come over from Washington?

LYON: He was head of political affairs in the Embassy. He was there in the Embassy, but the thing was, they divided up. They had, you see, Economic Counselor, Political Counselor, and to make it fair, they had some go to the Elysï¿½e dinner and some to the Versailles. But it was unfortunate that they happened to fall in the first dinner rather than the second. But, anyway, it was memorable.

You know, I used to write my father every week, and when my mother died, you know, I didn't miss so much the wonderful things she always did for me as much. It's always what you do for others that you miss. I missed the weekly letters.

Q: The letters to her?

LYON: I knew they meant so much to her, and no matter what our lives were, I'd write a weekly letter bringing her up to date on everything that happened that week.

Q: And here's this marvelous account.

LYON: And this was after my mother's death. She died in 1959, and I continued writing to my father and my sister, Lilla, who was looking after him, so she would read it to him. He had problems with reading then. But I'm glad to have it for the record. I want Cecil to put it into his "Lyon's Tale," which he has published, which is following the "Lyon's Share." So, anyway, shall I tell you about our hearing about Ceylon and end on that?

Q: Yes, why not?

LYON: We knew we had to leave France. Well, for awhile we were supposed to leave and go to Hong Kong, and that fell through. I forget exactly what year at this point. And then it fell through, and we were kept in Paris. And, of course, we were delighted. We were going to be kept there as assistants to NATO, Ambassador Finletter [Thomas Knight Finletter, US Representative to NATO, 1961], but then Gavin [General James Gavin, AEP to France, 1961-62] said no, he wanted us, and we were batted back and forth like a tennis ball. It ended up with Durbrow [Elbridge Durbrow, AEP Vietnam, 1957-61] quite happily, who was to succeed us, going to Finletter and we staying in the Embassy.

So we were very lucky and we'd been there a long while - six and a half years - and we knew we would have to leave, because we couldn't stay indefinitely. It was just too wonderful. Findley Burns was working as Head of Personnel. He called Cecil on the telephone and he said, "You have a post. It will be, I'm sure, your cup of tea, but I'm not sure it will be Elsie's." Well, it turned out to be my cup of tea. But Cecil was supposed to realize "tea" [meant] Ceylon. He was to get the "double entendre," and he did guess that he was Ceylon. And I simply loved Ceylon. It was very much my cup of tea. I loved it.

Q: How did you...Did it take you awhile to learn those names?

LYON: Yes.

Q: They have the most long, complicated names.

LYON: Terrible names. We had a reception the day after we got there, and they introduced all these people - well, almost the day after - and all these long, long names. They were very hard to remember.

Q: Is there a pattern to them? Does a certain ending mean something or...?

LYON: Now I sponsor a little girl in Sri Lanka, and she's got a name that's got about ten syllables.

Q: And what do they mean? Anything? Or are they just names?

LYON: I think they probably do have a meaning, yes, yes.

Q: But I always thought that would be one of the drawbacks of a posting there.

LYON: And they had family names to try and remember. It isn't easy, but they're very friendly people. And we really loved it. I'm so sad with all the troubles.

Q: It's so sad.

LYON: Very sad. We were very fond of Jayawardene. Cecil writes to him from time to time. He sent him an editorial the other day from The New York Times. We have kept in touch, at least a one-way street. And anyway, we were there two and a half years.

Q: But what makes Colombo so much easier than Santiago? Was it the political...

LYON: It was more relaxed.

Q: ...the attitude?

LYON: It was an interesting political situation, because it was Mrs. Bandaranaike who had been Prime Minister, and then the United...the other party...came in. Sennanayake, he won, and Mrs. Bandaranaike was defeated. She was very much...very leftist. And then, while we were there, it was a chance to do a lot, to try and make it. Sennanayake was there while we were there...until we left.

Q: I've never been to that part of the world.

LYON: It's beautiful. I loved it. Very beautiful. And it was a more relaxed life. I mean, in that heat, you can't be too frenzied. No. Life was more relaxed. You'd eat out, and when you got to dinner, it was usually a buffet in a garden - more likely than not you'd be outdoors, so that was nice.

Q: Chile also, you must have been dining at eleven o'clock at night?

LYON: Oh, terrible hours. Frightful hours. In Ceylon, I got interested in the leper hospital. That's another long story. I used to go out to the leper hospital regularly, and I still keep in touch with at least one patient there and the family of an ex-patient who has since died. That was very tragic. Interesting. I mean, life wasn't all the beautiful side of life.

Q: You know, the interesting thing is that everyone, without fail, everyone that we've talked to remembers all the positive, happy parts about the Foreign Service.

LYON: That's good.

Q: And when I talked to one woman several weeks ago, she said, "Do I sound Pollyannish?" She said, "What about the illnesses and what about the...?"

LYON: I'm afraid I'm the only one who's dwelled on illness.

Q: Well, no, but I think it's fascinating that we...none of us do dwell on that really. I mean, you haven't dwelled on that. I mean, amoebic dysentery is a very serious thing.

LYON: [laughs] Can cramp your style.

Q: Yes, and it can be very debilitating. You haven't dwelled on it at all. You just glossed right over it. But we do tend to forget the....

LYON: Well, you remember the highlights.

Q: You remember the highlights and you forget the isolation, the illnesses, yes.

LYON: The Palace of Mirrors is something I'll never forget.

Q: Oh, the Hall of Mirrors? Oh, that's where the dinner was?

LYON: Yes. Wonderful, quite wonderful.

Q: I saw it empty.

LYON: But Ceylon had lots of poverty, and you couldn't help but let that get you down. You would try to do what you could, but the economy what it was and the enormous families... There was a lot of malnutrition, a lot of poverty.

Q: That's what I've always felt about a tour in India.

LYON: Oh, people came from....

Q: You would have to make yourself immune to all of that.

LYON: Do you know the people who came from India to Ceylon said, "At least you see people smiling. In India, no one smiles".

Q: Well, because they are born, live and die on the streets and never really have a full meal.

LYON: Just terrible.

Q: Yes.

LYON: I also got into reading for the blind.

Q: Did you have that overwhelming poverty in Ceylon?

LYON: Oh, you have a lot of poverty. A Tamil friend of mine started a library of reading for the blind. I also used to do that, to go and read to the blind, for those who could understand English.

And that was shortly before we left that I did that. But the leper hospital, I started almost immediately and would go regularly. It was sad. The attitude was interesting. I was once driving up to Nowara Eliya in the mountains with our Number One Boy, and I was in our Volkswagen. I said, "Here the children we see look so undernourished." And he said, "Oh, but our children are our only joy." And I said, "Well, when you haven't enough to feed them..." "Oh, they're all we have...our children"

Family planning (of which there was a lot in Ceylon) had an uphill job. And I had a Tamil friend who would work for it, and she would say, "Now, when you plant your gardens, you plant your squashes in rows, don't you? And you don't put the squashes too close to each other, do you?" "Oh, no, no. Then they wouldn't grow." "All right. Well, when you have your babies one after another, how can the babies be healthy?" And that hadn't occurred to them. She would try to describe it that way.

Q: She put it in a context that they could understand.

LYON: Yes...of their squashes in their garden.

Q: Did that make any impression?

LYON: I think some, but it was uphill, because their children were their great joy.

Q: And their social security too.

LYON: I still get a letter from someone I'm helping in Sri Lanka. I help him regularly. He says if it weren't for me, he'd be starving. And he probably would have starved long since, but his attitude is that if his little boy hadn't died, he could now look after them. And I thought, "My goodness, what a life he would like for that child." He said, "He would look after us in our old age," and I thought, "Poor boy." He died a little boy. He had parasites and he died. And in every letter he wails about the fact that his child died so they had no one to look after them.

Q: To take care of them now, yes. But he has you to take the place of the child.

LYON: Well. [laughs] I mean, I'm not there. I help him financially, but that's not everything. He had to have children.

Q: You have to have dozens of children, because half of them die and the other half hopefully would live to take care of you. This is awfully hard to overcome...that social pattern.

LYON: Yes. You've been very patient with me. I think we've come to theend.

Q: Well, you have been very kind to let us come on a very busy day.

LYON: I think I'm going to get you some more tapes, because how many have we used?

Q: Only two.

LYON: Let me go get another tape, because I got ten yesterday.

***

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Spouse: Cecil B. Lyon

Spouse entered Service:1930Left Service: 1968

You entered Service:sameLeft Service: same

Status: Spouse of Retired Ambassador

Posts:

Place and Date of birth: Vienna, Austria; April 25, 1912

Maiden Name: Elizabeth Sturgis Grew

Women's College, Constantinople 1927-28

Date and place of marriage: October 7, 1933; Tokyo, while Joseph C. Grew was AEP to Japan

Profession: Foreign Service Spouse

Positions at post, in Washington: Reading for Blind, Paris, Ceylon; Nurse's Aide, Veteran's Hospital WDC & Peterborough, New Hampshire; Visiting poor for American Cathedral, Paris; Working at leper hospital in Ceylon.

End of interview