

Foreign Service Spouse Series

JOAN M. PRYCE

Interviewed by: Monique Wong

Initial interview date: December 7, 1992

Q: This is Monique Wong on December 7, 1992. I'm interviewing Mrs. Joan Pryce for the Foreign Service Spouse Oral History. We're at the Foreign Service Institute at 1400 Key Boulevard in Rosslyn, Virginia. This is Tape I, Side A.

Joan, I'm really glad that I'm here with you. Really, I'm really happy to be doing this interview with you.

PRYCE: Thank you honey.

Q: I'd like to start with the employment program. I noticed that you got a Superior Honor Award for Employment Programs while you worked at FLO. I'd like to hear your views on the progress of the program at FLO during the five years you were there.

PRYCE: I would like to say in the beginning when I came into FLO there were a number of programs that were already in place. That was actually the end of 1986. But what we found was that spouse employment had become an increasingly larger issue in the Foreign Service. That there were many, many more spouses at that time who were really interested in working and that the two-career family had really become the norm in the United States and therefore also in the Foreign Service.

And that many of the spouses were interested in working, not just with the idea of keeping busy or finding something to do overseas, but with the idea that they really needed that income. Washington had become very expensive to live here, to purchase a home. The cost of a mortgage was very, very high. And of course if Foreign Service families, had children to educate, college expenses were a very big concern. And at that point, Foreign Service salaries really hadn't kept up with inflation by any means, and so people really felt a financial need. If they had lived in the Washington area and a Foreign Service spouse had worked here, when they went overseas they really felt they were taking a drop in income.

I think about that time we began to see some spouses objecting to going overseas and actually families turning down overseas assignments because they felt that they didn't want to give up the financial basis of their family made up of those two incomes.

Also, at the same time there were much higher levels of education. Spouses were coming into the Foreign Service with master's degrees, sometimes more than one or a Ph.D., and most of them seemed to have bachelor's degrees, and they were very interested in using their education. They really didn't want to give up those opportunities to use all their training and experience.

Q: So what kinds of programs were already going on when you came into work at FLO in 1986?

PRYCE: When I came in, one of the main programs that I was working on was the establishment of the Skills Bank. That had already been begun by my predecessor, Anne Heard. We were tasked with finishing up that project and getting the Skills Bank running. And we thought that that was really going to be one of our major programs in the spouse employment area. And it has proven to be a major resource for Foreign Service spouses.

Q: The idea of the Skills Bank actually started right at the beginning when FLO was established in 1978, but it didn't actually get implemented until much later then.

PRYCE: That's right. The Skills Bank was recognized as a needed program back around '76, '78, and there was an initial program that was started, but it was basically a paper file. Someone was trying to get that going by sending out a survey to spouses, having them send back information, and then keeping a file. But of course what happened was, it relied on the spouses actually sending in their address changes every time they moved, and of course they didn't do that.

So that Skills Bank quickly became out of date, so it wasn't until about 1985 that we began the final Skills Bank and that was a computerized Skills Bank. In fact, you're absolutely right Monique. It started out in about '78, and it was an item in the Foreign Service Act of 1980, actually mandating that the Secretary of State establish a catalogue of Foreign Service spouse skills and that was the Skills Bank. So it was actually legislated.

Q: So who was actively working on the Skills Bank? You mentioned Anne Heard?

PRYCE: Anne Heardin 1985 and the beginning of 1986 worked on the initial steps of the Skills Bank. And that was when FLO worked out a contract with an outside company to come in and develop it on what we call a data user computer program. We just had a lot of problems with it and we had to get the State Department very much involved in straightening out the bugs and getting the program up and running. It took a long time, but it was running by 1987.

Q: And obviously is going very well now.

PRYCE: And it runs very well now and we've added a lot of new programs. One of the things that we're looking for in the future is to expand the Skills Bank so that we can put more information into it, more specialized information, and be able to do networking through it which we think is very important now to give spouses every benefit that they can get in order to find employment by networking with each other.

Q: I know that something like that exists also, say, through alumni associations and universities.

PRYCE: Yes, in fact those are very good models for us to look at, the networking systems that are set up by universities. They often are kind of a mentoring program where they take somebody who has really years of experience in a professional field who is willing to undertake the mentoring of a recent graduate. And we can certainly use that model in the Foreign Service.

Q: That would be great, that would be wonderful. So the Skills Bank was one of the programs gaining more and more importance when you first started. What are some others?

PRYCE: Another program that is running and has always run very well is the Employment Planning Workshop. That was started, probably in the mid-'70's, with just a one-day and then it expanded to a two-day workshop. Now we put on a five-day workshop so it's expanded greatly and it's very, very beneficial to spouses.

And then we've carried it a bit further in that we're going to send the workshop overseas rather than just giving it in the Washington area. We've developed a module to send it overseas so that spouses who are at post and have more time to take it there and do preparation for going on to another post or coming back to Washington will have all that useful information.

Q: That's a wonderful idea because I think sometimes those courses conflict with what you're doing in Washington, DC and you can't get away from having to go to some other seminars, so that certainly would be a good addition overseas. The workshop - that was developed by your office?

PRYCE: Actually it was developed by someone who was working in our office originally and then they brought in an outside contractor. That was Fran Bastress who is a professional career counselor. And she designed the basic workshop as we see it today. She was very much aware of the different elements of a job search and looked very closely at the problems that Foreign Service spouses have in seeking employment, and she developed a very good workshop. And she actually gave the workshop along with the person who was in my position in FLO for, I would say, about nine to ten years.

Q: Oh really? Now is this in conjunction with OBC?

PRYCE: Yes. The workshop is done by the Overseas Briefing Center and FLO jointly, and it is one of the OBC scheduled workshops. And because the OBC is the training arm of the Foreign Service, it was appropriate that the workshop be centered at the Overseas Briefing Center.

Q: Are there other similar programs that are run jointly?

PRYCE: That's really the only one that has to do with employment. We have occasionally... I've worked with the Life After the Foreign Service program for retiring Foreign Service officers and their spouses and how to help them with employment, and helped develop the resume writing segment of that workshop and so on, so occasionally we work on other workshops, but basically that's the only one that has to do with employment.

Q: So these are the two main programs. What are some of the ongoing concerns in relation to employment for spouses in FLO?

PRYCE: Well I think there are a lot of trends that we look at, and we have to be very much aware of those as we look at new programs for Foreign Service spouses related to employment. First of all I think the fact that we have people working in all different fields is very important. You know, it used to be that women were secretaries, teachers and nurses and now they're in absolutely every field that you can imagine. And so we can't rely on Mission employment. Mission employment has mainly been where Foreign Service spouses take the supportive positions, secretarial, clerical, perhaps a job in budget or personnel and so on.

But with the range of skills that we find, we're going to have to look more to the outside community for employment. And we have doctors and lawyers and farmers and pilots and chemists and all kinds of people in that Foreign Service spouse corps. We're looking at establishing more bilateral work agreements so that people have access to employment on the local economy which should broaden the range of employment. But we also have to look at expanding other opportunities. More creative use of contract employment, maybe through AID or through other organizations. Being able to hire spouses as consultants or as temporary contractors. So we need to establish better programs, better communication, and more outreach in that area.

Also, I mentioned networking. I think networking is very important. If you have a spouse coming into the Foreign Service who is a lawyer, they feel like they're starting from Ground Zero. They have to find out where have lawyers worked, where might I work? How do I go about getting a legal job in the Middle East or the Far East, etc. Where can my skills be used? But if we had an established network, they could take advantage of other lawyers who have already done that groundwork in those regions and know what the possibilities are and actually may provide real connections. So I think networking is an area where we have to really expand.

That kind of fits into communications and I think we have a real need for better communications among spouses and people in professional areas, and better communication about the programs that FLO offers and the training that the State Department makes available to spouses and so on. All the things that spouses can take advantage of to make having some kind of professional, successful career overseas and in the Washington area as well. Communications and networking and reaching outside the embassy.

And then internally, there are two areas that I think we need to expand on. One is for the people who are interested in continuity between mission employment overseas and the government employment. When they come back to Washington and they would like to work in the State Department and make use of their experience having worked in an embassy in our temporary positions within the mission, we need to develop better continuity there. And actually try to develop more substantive jobs so that if they are doing, say a secretarial job in one post, that they can also be assured of at least getting highest previous rate, or perhaps have some kind of a promotion or way to move up within those particular kinds of jobs that are offered within the mission.

We want to look for more substantive jobs in the mission, and as we face budget cuts within the Foreign Service, I think there's a real opportunity to do that. There may be shortages or gaps when Foreign Service officers are not at post, and we may have spouses who are skilled in certain areas, have had the appropriate training, and can fill in. We've just had two spouses take positions in the Foreign Commercial Service, where the Foreign Commercial Service, because of budget cuts, are not able to staff those officer positions and they've hired spouses in two Latin American posts to fill in to run those offices while those positions are unfilled. So I think we'll see more of that, meaning to take advantage of those opportunities.

And the last thing I would say is that we need to work at a more flexible attitude toward senior spouses working. This is another trend. We have more and more ambassador spouses and DCM spouses working in our missions, and this often creates what we consider to be a conflict of interest or a perceived conflict of interest. And yet somehow it isn't fair to a professional spouse who has the appropriate skills not to be able to put them to use. And I think we have to look closely at that and try to be a little bit more flexible in that.

Q: How is it conflict of interest? I'm not quite sure I understand.

PRYCE: Basically, when a chief of mission's spouse, for example, would like to work, and they request permission to work within the mission, they have to send in the request to the Director General for approval. And they look at how the spouse is supervised to make sure that there are enough levels in between so that there is no conflict with the chief of mission being the head of the embassy. And also they have to look at how the person is hired to make sure that there is no perception of influence in hiring.

Q: So it goes beyond the usual hiring board or something?

PRYCE: That's right. Usually spouses are employed, you're correct, through the employment hiring committee at post, but in this case, they actually do have to come back to the Department, to the Director General for permission for that spouse to work.

Q: Interesting. So it seems like everybody's trying to make it very fair for everyone at post.

PRYCE: That's right. And it's worked very well. But they have had an objective view of these cases and in many cases the spouse has been given permission to work. But I think we have to recognize more and more that it is the norm for spouses to work, and that it isn't fair to cut off their employment if they can manage to work without any conflict of interest.

Q: Let's go back to the point about the bilateral agreement, Joan. Perhaps you can give me a little history of that and also the conceptual agreement, and with those, addressing the work situation in the local economy in general where those two don't exist.

PRYCE: Well, the program to negotiate bilateral agreements with other countries are based on reciprocity. If a country allows our spouses to work there, we will reciprocate and allow their spouses to work here. And basically, you're correct, there are two ways to do that. One is the form of bilateral agreement where we have an exchange of diplomatic notes and that's a negotiated, signed agreement, and therefore it's lasting and it's a firm agreement. People can really count on being able to get work permits.

The second kind of arrangement is what we call de facto reciprocity, or an informal arrangement, and that simply means that we recognize that in a certain country - for instance in Singapore, we just established the informal reciprocity with Singapore - they have been issuing work permits to our spouses, but we were never able to get a formal bilateral agreement. But they were permitting our spouses to work. So on an informal basis, we now permit them to work. The difference is that we put more restrictions on the informal arrangement here in the United States.

Q: For Singaporeans who want to work here?

PRYCE: Right. They have to get the job first, and then bring a job letter to the Office of Protocol in the State Department, and we look at the kind of work of work they're going to be doing. And we put restrictions in that they are not able to do jobs that are listed in the Department of Labor, Schedule B listing which is basically the unskilled type work. So they're limited as to the kind of work that can be done. It also means that the process for getting permission to work takes longer. And because it's informal and nothing's in writing, it can be canceled at any time. So if a spouse were to find Singapore on the list and then go out to post and six months later find out that suddenly there had been a problem and they were no longer able to get work permits... It can change very quickly, so that could be very disappointing. So it's a less secure situation and it takes more time and there can be restrictions on the type of work that can be done. But those are basically the two forms of agreement.

Q: When you mentioned the U.S. permitting Singaporeans working here, we're talking about the diplomats, aren't we?

PRYCE: Right. We're talking about diplomatic and consular people assigned to official duty and it doesn't include the spouses of business people or other people in the private sector. It simply relates to officials of that government who are assigned to the corresponding host countries.

Q: I just wanted to make sure that that's what the bilateral agreement and the de facto agreement covered. Dealing with diplomatic corps, basically.

PRYCE: That's correct.

Q: So in the situation of the de facto agreement, you still need to get work permits. And what about when neither of those, bilateral or de facto, exists?

PRYCE: That's a good question. When there isn't a de facto arrangement or a formal bilateral agreement, it may still be possible to work in a foreign country. For example, in the old Soviet Union, we did have some spouses who worked for American firms and so on. An American law firm was one example. Another was a correspondent who was working there. At that point the Soviet government just didn't seem to care whether people worked, but they wouldn't consider a bilateral agreement.

Q: That was when?

PRYCE: That was before the break-up of the Soviet Union, so say through the '80s. There were spouses who did work. Sometimes it's better not to raise the question because at that point the Soviets would not have wanted their spouses, they would not have permitted their spouses to work here in the United States. There was no point in approaching the subject of a reciprocal arrangement. So we just simply allowed our spouses to work. There was no change in their status.

Which is often another question. The question of immunity, especially criminal immunity, comes into these agreements and we have to be assured that there's no requirement to waive criminal immunity. But as long as there is no restriction like that, a change of status in any way affecting their immunities, we will permit spouses to work sometimes even though we don't have a formal agreement or an informal arrangement. But in most countries we find that unless we have negotiated a formal bilateral agreement or have found that this informal reciprocity exists, it's generally not possible to work, but there will be exceptions, as I mentioned, like the Soviet Union.

Q: When was the first bilateral agreement signed?

PRYCE: The first one was signed in 1980 with Canada.

Q: I guess our good neighbor, right?

PRYCE: Yes. (laughs)

Q: Have there been any bilateral agreements overturned over the years?

PRYCE: Not really. We have had to cut off the de facto reciprocity in a couple of cases because our spouses were not given permission to work, and so we had to reciprocate and turn off the work permits here in the U.S. But it's been fairly stable, and certainly the number has grown. We have thirty-seven bilateral work agreements now and I believe sixty-six informal agreements.

Q: Are they being currently negotiated now?

PRYCE: Yes, I would say about six or seven are being negotiated right now. There are always a number that are in active negotiation, and some can take a considerable period of time. The agreement with France took about five years and we negotiated one with Spain recently, and that took about two years, so they can take a long time.

Q: But it's certainly moving in the right direction.

PRYCE: It really is and it's helped a lot of people.

Q: You mentioned having to waive criminal immunity, but there's another aspect. It's the administrative immunity that you often have to waive when you work in the local economy.

PRYCE: Right. We expect to waive civil and administrative immunities when a spouse takes employment in the local economy, and we just won't agree to subjecting spouses to criminal jurisdiction in a foreign country. So we don't waive criminal immunity. And that was the problem with the French agreement, and it often is the problem with some countries. But we've never, in over ten years of working with these bilateral agreements, we've never had a problem where a spouse has been involved in any kind of criminal activity, so we've never had a case where that even entered into it.

Q: Which should be.

PRYCE: Exactly, exactly.

Q: Perhaps you can clarify briefly the civil immunity and the administrative immunity for me.

PRYCE: Well civil and administrative immunities are things like getting a license. If you had to get a certain license or you were obligated to pay a certain tax or fees and those kinds of things, so it's basically those kinds of administrative...

Q: So basically you observe the local laws if you work in the local economy and you pay the local taxes. That's basically...

PRYCE: That's right. You pay local taxes and local social security if that's required, and so on.

Q: So you just do business, in other words, like a resident or citizen would in that country if you want to work there.

PRYCE: That's correct.

Q: I think that sounds fair. Let's look at perhaps what your typical week was like when you worked at FLO.

PRYCE: (laughs) That's hard to say because in the FLO you never know what's going to happen, but in general I spent a lot of time counseling people which was very interesting and very gratifying because spouses would often come in who were very concerned about getting a job search in the Washington area or going overseas and what in the world were they going to find. Especially working with new spouses from the A100 courses and so on, and trying to give them an idea of what they could expect in terms of employment in the Foreign Service. And of course it isn't a bed of roses. We know that. It's very, very frustrating. We felt very obligated in FLO to give a realistic picture, so counseling was very important, we felt, to give people an accurate idea of what their expectations might be.

Q: Is that actually part of the job description for the employment coordinator?

PRYCE: It is. It definitely is part of that job. Now that can be very time-consuming and they may be interested in government employment and we talk about how to write the SF 171 and how to begin to network and try to explain the Civil Service system and so on. So one of the things we did was we started, not only through the workshop, but we also started some networking meetings for spouses where they could make contact with other people working in the government and find out about programs that were offered there where they could get more information as they needed, and they could call on as they went through their job search.

And then another part of my job was doing presentations. Talking to the A100 course. I also talked to the people going to the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries. That was before the break-up of the Soviet Union. And I spoke with spouses from the Defense Intelligence Agency and other groups from the other foreign affairs agencies, and did kind of group counseling in a way, presenting the employment picture to larger groups through presentation.

And then also I worked quite a bit on the negotiation of bilateral work agreements. That was also a very time-consuming part of the program. And then one of the major responsibilities was the development of new programs, and we were fortunate in that we tried very hard to come up with new ideas and new programs that would have spouses, and while I was there, we finished the work on the Skills Bank and then we developed this office program in which I threw Civil Service employment in the U.S. and overseas temporary employment together and gives continuity which was a wonderful program.

And then in the last year we were given a special fund from the Under Secretary and we developed some special project initiatives whereby people could create their own employment program and then submit it to the mission and the mission submitted it to the Department, and we reviewed them and then selected certain projects which we funded from funds that were given to our office. We also had three or four other parts to that program that we developed under the Under Secretary's initiative. So developing new programs was definitely also a part of the program which required a lot of writing memos, meetings, getting together with people in the Department, getting support for those programs, and getting them through.

Q: Obviously in the development of new programs, you have to work with other people in the office well. How many people do you normally work with and how does the employment program relate to the other arms or the other programs under FLO?

PRYCE: Well it relates very closely, actually. Of course the Director and the Deputy Director in the office were very instrumental in the employment programs and often worked very closely with the highest levels of management to promote the ideas that we were putting forward. So we worked very closely. And then we also worked with the other key people in the office. The education counselor was very instrumental in some of the programs we worked on in the education field. Many of our spouses are teachers so we work very closely together.

And one of the new programs that we did develop was with Fairfax County. Kay Eakin, the education counselor and I, worked with the Fairfax County public schools to get an exception for Foreign Service spouses who were teaching in the Fairfax County schools so that if they went overseas, they were on a leave of absence, and as long as they kept up some educational activity, whether it was an administrative activity or perhaps teaching or working in a school library or teaching English as a second language. As long as they thought it was educational, they would keep them on a leave of absence, allowing them to come back into the Fairfax County system at the same level at which they left, and also giving them a certain priority in hiring which they didn't have before.

Q: Wow! This is marvelous.

PRYCE: And it came up, interestingly enough, because there was a Foreign Service spouse who had reached a certain level in the Fairfax County schools and did not want to go overseas with her husband because she felt that she would come back and have to start all over again and that her career would be greatly punished by an overseas assignment and so we were able to do that and it worked for her to go on a leave of absence. And she did go out to post with her husband. But that's how that came about, but we had, I believe, at least fourteen spouses that we know of that have taken advantage of that so far.

Q: This reminds me of what we have talked about previously. You know other meetings of ours. You know we really need to set the precedents. That's what helps get new programs going and it seems like this is a perfect example of that kind of thing. That somebody really needed that and that FLO was able to take advantage of that situation, if you will, and push it a little bit further so that other people can take advantage of the new system now we have with the Fairfax County school system.

PRYCE: That's another part of our reaching out, I think, to the private sector and even to the counties and school systems here. But we were certainly able to put forward a good argument in that we have spouses who have worked in cross-cultural situations, and when you look at the make-up of the Fairfax County school body now and you see the number of nationalities and the cross-cultural situations that have developed there, we certainly were able to present Foreign Service spouse teachers in a very good light and that I think really helped us a lot.

Q: Now there were a couple of other people that you worked with in the employment?

PRYCE: Well another case is working with the Support Services Officer who works on evacuations and emergency situations. Family crises such as separation and divorce.

Q: So when they suddenly need a job somewhere, or somewhere else...

PRYCE: Often people who come in and talk to - in this case it was JoAnne Vaughn - about perhaps a separation or divorce are often suddenly faced with becoming independent and must find a job that pays so that they can support themselves and perhaps a family. So Joanne and I work very closely together to try to help people through those situations. Also with evacuations, we were able to develop an on-going policy for spouses who are working at a post and are evacuated. And we put them on leave-without-pay so they maintain their clearance and they could be picked up in the Department without basically any break in service from their overseas job. So we found that often with an evacuation, the regional bureau was greatly overworked. They had a lot of work to be done and not enough people, and so by bringing the spouses who were familiar with that post that was evacuated back to the Department on leave-without-pay, they could be hired very quickly and put to work and they were very useful and the bureaus really appreciated that.

We also have put some of the CLOs to work in our office helping evacuees. They also were put on leave-without-pay. So by working an employment program, putting spouses on leave-without-pay when they're evacuated, we not only helped our own office, we helped other offices and helped the spouses at the same time.

Q: That also helps you sell a program doesn't it? (laughs)

PRYCE: So we all worked together and there is a lot of overlap in what we do in FLO.

Q: And another employment officer, Kathleen Bacchus was there. Now it's...

PRYCE: Erin Rooney is now the Program Assistant in Employment and Erin does the overseas counseling and does some of the presentations, and she also works with the SADERS, the Semi-Annual-Dependent Reports that come from post.

Q: I see. And now we have a new officer in your position since you left in November. And it's the first male spouse I gather?

PRYCE: (laughs) That's right. We're really pleased to have David Ball taking over as Employment Program Coordinator and, as you say, he's the first male spouse that we've had working in the Family Liaison Office. And we're really pleased because we feel this is a perfect match, really. David has a wonderful education and has a Ph.D. He's worked in the Peace Corps. He's done a lot of training and he also has run an overseas school. And he has been most recently an assistant personnel officer overseas in Legaire.

Q: So he has a lot of experience?

PRYCE: So he has a lot of good experience and he has a very good knowledge of personnel regulations and so on which I think will be very useful to him in this job. And he's very enthusiastic. I think he's got a lot of new ideas and I think he'll really carry the program forward.

Q: Was that just sort of a coincidence that he applied for the job, or did you have to go out and look for him?

PRYCE: No, no, it's kind of interesting. We've had quite a few male candidates for jobs in FLO and this seemed to be the first time that we had the right match of the job and the person and their background, so we were very pleased. We've always considered males and would like very much of course to have a male spouse.

Q: On the record?

PRYCE: Yes, absolutely. And we feel they're very much a part of the spouse corps. We have over 700 male spouses in the Foreign Service, so there's a great number, and we've always included them in all of our programs. We usually have a couple of male spouses attending the workshops and they take part in all the programs, so it's very appropriate to have a male.

Q: How does that affect his functioning in counseling other spouses? Yes, there are 700 male spouses, but the majority are still going to be female spouses. Is that going to be...

PRYCE: I think it'll work out very well. I think David is a very sensitive person and very caring, and I think he'll do very well in the counseling aspect. Also we find that the issues that we find in employment are exactly the same for males and females. There was a survey done about 1988, I believe, by the Overseas Briefing Center of male spouses in the Foreign Service and a lot of the questions related to employment. The issues that were raised were exactly the same issues. The responses that we got from male spouses were exactly the same as what we find we get from female spouses, so we think the issues are exactly the same.

Q: That actually answered my next question. I was going to ask you if there'll be any change in emphasis because he's a male spouse. Now that he's going to just take care of the male spouses of course, but just from the perspective that he might see things a little bit differently as a male spouse. Any predictions?

PRYCE: I don't think so. I think that basically the programs that we have are pretty well founded and I think they'll continue, and there'll be an expansion of those programs, but I think they'll be appropriate for both female and male spouses.

Q: Great. (End of Tape I, Side A)

Joan, I'd like to ask you to address a little bit on the foreign-born spouses' concerns with employment. Perhaps you can just outline a few of the things that a foreign-born spouse may face that an American spouse may not.

PRYCE: First of all I think it's important to realize that we do have a lot of foreign-born spouses in the Foreign Service. Probably at least a third of our spouses are foreign-born. Through the Skills Bank we've actually come up with lists of how many spouses from each country we have which is very interesting. I think the most are perhaps from the United Kingdom and Canada and so on, but there are numbers from the Asian region, Latin America, Africa and so on.

Q: Where there have been Armed Forces there. The Philippines, Korea.

PRYCE: That's right. There are quite a few from the Philippines. That's correct. But they do face different limitations as far as employment goes. It's tough in the Foreign Service as it is for anyone, but it is a little bit more difficult in most cases for foreign-born spouses because many of the mission jobs are closed to people who are not U.S. citizens. And so when we find the temporary jobs overseas in the mission that require U.S. citizenship, there will be some spouses who don't have their U.S. citizenship that will not be able to apply for those jobs.

So that means that they can work in contract jobs that don't require citizenship. They may be able to work for the Recreation Association. Still those are positions connected with the mission, but they don't require citizenship. Or they may be able to work in the local economy if there is a bilateral agreement. And they often work at the school. They can teach. Sometimes they teach their native language overseas, and so that can be a very useful skill for many of the foreign-born spouses.

Then when they come back to the Washington area, they again find that they have difficulties. First of all, if they haven't lived in the Washington area before, it is a big impersonal city and it is very hard to adjust to it, and then on top of it to try to go out and find employment, they may find that they are handicapped because they're not familiar with the customs and the traditions of the United States plus they don't have knowledge of the city and how business is done. And they may have some difficulties with the language. So all those things become barriers in a way for foreign-born spouses.

And we try very much to help those spouses to adjust and to overcome those barriers that they find, either overseas or in the Washington area. What we like to do if we can is to have them go through the employment workshop where they really have contact with other Foreign Service spouses who have similar backgrounds and they find a supportive group there. Also, through AAFSW, as you're aware more than anyone, the Foreign-Born Spouse Group can be of great assistance, I think.

The spouses, I think, tend to adjust fairly quickly and find that they may need the support for maybe the first year or year and a half that they're here. And then they find a niche and find either employment or find activities that interest them, and they begin to assimilate and the adjustment really is on its way. But there are really considerable issues there that need to be addressed, I think.

Q: Of course it was useful when you came to the Foreign-Born Spouse Group to speak directly to the foreign-born spouses about these concerns and I recall the people really enjoyed your talk and really found it useful because for once they are being talked to, taking their background, their foreign-born status into consideration, so that was a very useful talk that you gave in October for the group. Now citizenship is definitely an issue for overseas employment in the mission. It seems like that may be less of an issue when you're in the States because as a permanent resident you can still work.

PRYCE: Yes, that's right. As a permanent resident you can work, so that's not as much of a problem.

Q: That brought me to the Rockefeller Amendment that I believe opens up to the overseas Americans opportunities to work at the mission. Could you comment on that?

PRYCE: Yes. That came about because there are several very active groups of American citizens who live overseas, and they were very interested in getting jobs in our U.S. embassy missions, primarily in Europe. I think what sparked the interest there was the fact that there are large numbers of Foreign Service nationals working in American embassies. They're very well paid and they have very substantive jobs. Of course some of the requirements for those jobs are that you speak the language and that you're familiar with the country and its customs and that you have continuity, in other words that you're going to be staying and living in that country. And so the feeling was that these American citizens could meet that criteria, and not only should those jobs be available to Foreign Service nationals, the nationals of that host country, but why not hire a U.S. citizen who had the same qualifications?

So they went to Senator Rockefeller and they suggested that an amendment be put on the Foreign Service Act saying that U.S. citizen residents could be hired by American embassies. And Rockefeller felt that they made a very good case and agreed to do that. Well the background is that in reality, our missions have always been able to hire U.S. citizen residents overseas and they're hired on the same basis that U.S. Foreign Service spouses are hired. They're hired in temporary positions and they're paid on the U.S. pay scale.

And so there was a misunderstanding there that U.S. citizens thought they could not be hired by the mission, and in some cases the missions didn't understand it and were putting out the wrong word. So they always were able to be hired. They looked at the Foreign Service Act of 1980 and saw that the act required that the Secretary of State develop a pay scale for Foreign Service nationals and a pay scale for family members of Foreign Service employees. But it didn't mention a pay scale for U.S. citizen residents, and therefore they thought by changing that part of the Foreign Service Act and adding U.S. citizen residents into that section, they would be opening employment opportunities.

Well, as it turns out, the State Department, very effectively I think, lobbied that it would be very unfair to hire U.S. citizen residents on a different pay scale than U.S. Foreign Service spouses and that you would have two U.S. citizen employees, if you hired them on different pay scales, working in the same type of positions, but in two different pay scales. And because this was Europe, the FSN pay scales were higher than U.S. pay scales. So Rockefeller agreed that this would be a problem and that U.S. citizen residents should be paid the same as U.S. Foreign Service spouses, so they would both get the same U.S. pay scale.

Q: Joan, I'm a little bit confused here because you started out saying that the overseas Americans wanted the Foreign Service national jobs, not really the already available Foreign Service spouse positions.

PRYCE: That's right.

Q: And so are they after the Foreign Service national jobs or are they after the...

PRYCE: They are. What they're interested in are the FSN jobs and they've always been able to have the other temporary jobs, so that is true.

Q: That's what I gathered. Okay. But if they were to take the FSN positions, they should be paid at the same scale as the Foreign Service spouses' scale.

PRYCE: That's right.

Q: But they can hold the FSN positions, the longer-term, in other words.

PRYCE: That's right. What they're looking at now, and I'm not totally up to date on this in the last month, is opening up Foreign Service national positions when they become vacant and being able to advertise the Foreign Service national positions for three different categories of people: Foreign Service nationals, Foreign Service spouses, and U.S. citizen residents. This is going to be very complicated because there will be two pay scales. So I don't know how that's going to be resolved.

Q: You're still going to have the American pay scale that covers the Foreign Service spouses or, you know, family members, and then the overseas Americans, and then the other scale which apparently is higher for the Foreign Service nationals, at least in Europe.

PRYCE: And then of course we're looking at the whole picture world-wide. In other regions, in the African region and Latin American region, Foreign Service nationals are paid less than the U.S. pay scale, so there will be repercussions throughout the world. So it's something that we have to look at very closely and try to make sure that it doesn't hurt the spouse employment picture in the mission, I would say.

Q: Does FLO have an official input in this matter?

PRYCE: We certainly express our views to management in the State Department who deal with Senator Rockefeller's office and other offices on the Hill. Also, AFSA and AAFSW are very concerned about the issue and have discussed it with FLO and those are the two bodies that actually lobby on the Hill, and so our concerns have been expressed through those two organizations.

Q: I see. Has this been officially approved? Is it going to start taking effect overseas?

PRYCE: It hasn't been approved. It was raised just before Congress went into recess this year and it will come up again after January 20th sometime when we will look at it again, and the Department will have to come up with some kind of steps that may resolve the issues that Senator Rockefeller's been addressing.

Q: I see. Joan, I'm aware of something called the Foreign Service Associates Proposal.

PRYCE: Oh yes!

Q: And it seems to me that the current employment program at FLO has roots in that. Do you agree?

PRYCE: Absolutely. The Foreign Service Associates Program is a wonderful program that AAFSW worked on and a very competent professional group of members wrote and did a lot of research to develop the Foreign Service Associates Program. Many of the ideas that we incorporate into our employment programs really go back to that original FSA program. The AFMA program...

Q: Which stands for?

PRYCE: For American Family Member Associates Program. We looked very closely at the FSA program when we developed the AFMA program and we realized that there were a lot of good ideas there and we tried to carry those out. And additionally when we developed the special grants program through the Rogers Funding we definitely took into consideration another segment of the FSA program which called for basically a grant-type program where spouses created their own ideas about how to be employed and came up with original ideas.

It wasn't carried out as far as we would like to see it go. Because of the budget cuts, we felt the program had to be very closely associated with mission employment so that a spouse had to identify an employment project which helped the mission goals very directly. We didn't address, for instance, a spouse who wanted to go out and set up a nutritional center in the jungle somewhere, which might be basically under an AID project or something like that. We looked more closely at the work that needed to be done within the mission. So hopefully we'll be able to expand on that and even carry it further and closer to the FSA program.

Q: Great. I'm glad I now clarified that.

PRYCE: Absolutely. Those are wonderful ideas.

Q: Am I correct to say that the Employment Program at FLO has more emphasis on the overseas work situation than in DC?

PRYCE: In a sense it does because we think of the overseas employment as being the most frustrating, and the fact that some spouses are opting not to go overseas now because of their career considerations. So in a way that's the most difficult program to develop and so we do concentrate a lot on the overseas employment picture, although we do spend quite a bit of our time working on helping spouses when they come back to the Washington area. But there just are a lot more opportunities here and there are also a lot more support groups that are privately funded or funded by county governments and so on where people can get help.

So I think our role in the Washington area is more helping people get their networking started, letting them know what resources are available and so on, whereas in overseas employment, we have to take a pro-active role in actually creating programs, trying to develop jobs as we have done in these various programs.

Q: Joan, you may not be able to give me the specific figures, but I'll try to ask anyway. What do you suppose the percentage of work available to spouses from different agencies, let's say overseas of course, from the mission, from AID, from other foreign affairs agencies, and from the local economy. Do you have some idea of how that breaks down?

PRYCE: I really can't give you specific figures. Most of the temporary employment within the mission is State Department employment. Occasionally, there may be one or two jobs in USIA or one job in the Foreign Commercial Service. So with the other agencies, it's fairly limited. Now AID provides a great deal of wonderful employment for spouses, but they're only in 75 different posts, so we have, say 255 posts. And if AID is only in 75, that automatically limits the opportunities to many fewer posts. And it depends on the size of the posts also. But basically, I would say the AID contracts often provide the most challenging and substantive work, but only in developing countries. And mission employment worldwide is generally provided by the State Department with the other agencies adding some, but many fewer jobs.

Q: So we still depend a lot on the mission providing most of the jobs.

PRYCE: We do, we do.

Q: Joan, perhaps you can tell me a little bit about how your overseas experiences prepared you for this position at FLO that you did for five years as an employment coordinator.

PRYCE: Right. First of all, I'd have to say personally that working has always been very important to me. I really like to work. I enjoy working and have always sought to work in one way or another, whether it's paid or unpaid work. I have a degree in business administration, actually in marketing, and have worked in retail stores before I came in the Foreign Service, and also worked for the Military Assistance Institute when my husband first came in the Foreign Service. Then in our first post, I had young children and I did volunteer work.

In one post, in Guatemala, I was the PTA president and then I was elected to the school board, and the idea of trying to improve things in a private overseas school really became a full-time job for me. I was offered a position then - that was in Guatemala - but decided that it was more important to work with the school even though that was unpaid. So I devoted really almost eight hours a day, I would say, to developing what I could see as improvements for the school. That was a very interesting situation because one of the things I worked on was trying to get Foreign Service spouses hired as teachers in this school.

Q: Oh, so you were providing employment!

PRYCE: Yes, and found that the administration of the school was very opposed to that. They were basically hiring friends of the administrators of the school because this was one way that women in this country could have a paying job. They were not qualified as teachers, so that was a real battle. It was a very difficult objective. But we did manage to get a number of spouses hired and make some real progress in the school. But there were very difficult times there.

Let's see, after Guatemala we came back to Washington and there I worked in real estate and worked a lot with young couples buying their first home because I was very committed to the idea that real estate was an excellent [opportunity] and I felt I was helping people and it also fit in with my retailing and marketing background.

And then the first time that we served in Panama, I worked for the Bureau of the Census where they needed people temporarily during the 1970 Census, and through that job I was able to meet some of the key people in the Panama Canal Company who were actually personnel officers, so that was wonderful networking.

And also I met the person in charge of their whole marketing operation and retailing facilities which they had, and ended up getting a job as the manager of the Balboa Retail Store which was like running a department store. So that was one of my first jobs after my youngest child became a first grader and was in school most of the day. So that was a very challenging and responsible job. And that worked out very well, because later we went back to Panama and then it became the Panama Canal Commission after the treaties, and I worked for the Commission. They still had all my personnel papers and so on, and I worked in their Office of Executive Administration. So that worked out very well.

Another post where I didn't work, had an opportunity to work, but chose not to work, was Moscow. I found that it was just such an interesting and unique experience and the job that I was offered of course was working in the Embassy running the USIA library there. But because Soviets were not allowed to come into the Embassy (laughter), I felt like I would be closing myself up in an American community, and here I was in Moscow and I really chose to get out and try to do a lot more in the local communities. So I studied Russian while I was there and I studied ballet with a professor from the Bolshoi, and just tried to contact Soviets and let them know a little bit about the United States and so on. So there I chose not to work.

But another interesting job that I had was in Mexico City where I ran the Employees' Association. This was a job that was advertised in the Embassy Bulletin and it looked like it was basically running a commissary and then another contract. But it turned out to be a wonderful opportunity in that the whole organization had been losing money and needed to be reorganized. There were 135 employees, a few in the commissary. And then it involved running the guard force and the custodial force, maintenance people and clerical people that were hired on a contract through the Embassy. So it worked out to be a very responsible job. We had a budget of about 2 million dollars a year and a lot of personnel work, budget work, accounting, and general management and supervisory responsibilities. And probably that was a much more responsible job than I could have gotten in the United States at that point. It's interesting how some of those jobs that you see advertised can be very challenging.

And I also at one point worked in the Consular Section during the rush periods in Mexico City, so I did the interviewing and so on, so I was familiar with consular work. And because I've always been determined to try to work whenever I could, I felt that I would really like to help other spouses try to find challenging and interesting work, so I've been very grateful to have had the opportunity to work in FLO and to work with Foreign Service spouses who are a wonderful, wonderful group of people. Full of talent.

Q: Well, surely we're grateful to you. It sounds like all those were terrific experiences you had bringing into the program. And also, there's something more about that. I always feel with you, there's something that is below the surface. It's that outlook I guess, the real resourcefulness that I see in you. It's like, if it doesn't work this way, change it around.

PRYCE: That's right. I think it's having had a number of years of experience and having been committed to work when many Foreign Service spouses were not committed to work. I always, I think, felt that I should look at the options and try to find something that I really enjoyed doing that I felt was going to be useful and build skills. And so even in places where I couldn't work - Bolivia was one - where, when I first arrived, I knew it was going to be very difficult for me to work. My husband was the Chargé d'affaires and I didn't feel that I could take a job in the mission.

I was asked to be president of a book club and I always had said that I wanted to read more and I felt that I would really be building my own knowledge if I could do a lot more reading, and so I accepted the idea of being president of the book club. And it turned out to be a very professional organization and I was a bit timorous when I found out what I'd gotten into. They had sixty members of all different nationalities, really, but it was an English-speaking book club. And we actually surveyed the membership to determine what kind of books they wanted and then every week we read the "New York Times" and "The Washington Post" book reviews, and we ordered about fifteen new books a month. And at monthly meetings, we reviewed the books.

It was more like a literary association than it was a book club. We had professional authors, professional librarians in the club, men and women, and they did a wonderful job of reviewing the books and provided a lot of information. We had a library of about 4500 books and there was a waiting list to get in the club so that if you missed two meetings, you were out.

Q: Really? Wow!

PRYCE: So it was very strictly run, very professionally run, and it was a wonderful opportunity. But I found that that was a very gratifying thing to do, not only because I got to read more and build knowledge, but I also was able to run meetings, hold board meetings, develop committees, do problem-solving with all the different policies that we had and so forth, so it was very useful in building skills.

Q: What I'm hearing, if I may be so bold as to summarize, is that it seems like you can go for the paid positions, perhaps unpaid positions, you know, volunteer, perhaps you like to do something, and then, additionally, because you want to build some skills for the future. So there are a lot of ways around not spending all your time at home and doing nothing I guess is really the nutshell of it.

Let's move on to something else here, Joan. You served in Mexico twice, between 1961 and '63 and also again between '78 and '81. Looking at your topic sheet saying how you felt a change of roles of spouses. You started to touch on that a little bit. Perhaps you can use the background of Mexico City and tell me a little bit about how you saw the changes over the years.

PRYCE: Well, Mexico City was our first post and there was definitely a traditional role for Foreign Service spouses then. And it came right from the top people in the Embassy down. We were basically told that there were certain protocol things that we were supposed to do. We would wear hats and gloves at certain functions.

Q: In the heat?

PRYCE: (laughs) We all had our calling cards. We knew who we were supposed to call on and how the calling was set up.

Q: Are we talking about white gloves here?

PRYCE: White gloves.

Q: Oh my, my.

PRYCE: And there were real guidelines as to behavior and rules to be followed. And you were expected to support the senior spouses in their projects and sometimes in the entertaining and so on. And in my case, my husband's supervisor, his spouse had a project of helping a hospital and she was very committed to that. And the junior spouses were expected to take part in that project. And some of us felt that it was a very difficult situation because we had contact with patients in a very poor hospital and we had young children and we were very worried about bringing home some kind of diseases and so on. So we objected to that. In fact, I guess I was in the forefront of that, and we arranged to do other things that would support the project, but not directly what had originally been expected of us.

But there were other cases of Foreign Service wives, it was then, who were actually given orders to do certain things. And that was the Dark Ages, I think, as far as we're concerned now.

And then going back to Mexico City as the Political Counselor's wife then, and working in the Employees' Association where I was working probably ten hours a day and doing the representation that needed to be done. It was just a totally different outlook. People didn't do as much calling. There was some calling. I've always felt that making calls was useful and some people carried on and did the calls, but there was no stigma if someone didn't do the formal protocol, so.

Q: Did you do away with the gloves?

PRYCE: Yes, we did away with the hat and the gloves! (laughs)

Q: Wonderful. Speaking of representation, I'm looking at these VIP visits in Mexico. JFK in 1962 and President Carter in 1980. Could you tell me a little bit more about those events?

PRYCE: Yes. It was very exciting when President Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy came to Mexico. I think the whole country and the United States was very excited about this wonderful young, kind of glamorous couple taking over the Presidency. I believe that the trip to Mexico City was one of their first, if not the first visit, official visit, that they made outside of the U.S.

And Mexico City was absolutely electric with the idea that this wonderful President and his beautiful wife were coming to Mexico City. They had a big parade coming in from the airport and many, many people lined this long route coming into the city. And she was, I think, especially appreciated when she made a speech in Spanish.

Q: Did she really!

PRYCE: They thought that was just wonderful. But it was a very exciting time. And I remember the Embassy making very special preparations for that visit.

Q: I would think.

PRYCE: They found out what her favorite wine was.

Q: Really? What was it?

PRYCE: It's called (inaudible) I think. A French wine. And they bought a stock of this special wine. And President Kennedy, of course, had a back problem. They had to order a special bed for him.

Q: Is that right?

PRYCE: So they made special preparations. It was just a very exciting time I think. And then when President Carter came in 1979, that was a very quick visit. He arrived at the airport and went directly from the airport to a luncheon at the Foreign Ministry and had to make a speech at the luncheon. Unfortunately, I think he was a little tired and he misjudged his audience. That's when he made his famous reference to "Montezuma's Revenge" which did not sit at all well with the Mexicans. He hoped to pull off a humorous story and it turned out that it really did not go over very well. So that got him off in kind of the wrong foot in Mexico.

But it was a very busy time. The second day he was there, they had a special concert and Leonard Bernstein came and conducted the Mexico City Orchestra and they played like they had evidently never played before. That was held downtown at a theater. I remember that day a group of the women from the Embassy took Mrs. Vance out to visit the pyramids at Teotihuacan. We had a coffee for Mrs. Vance in the morning and then...

Q: Who was Mrs. Vance?

PRYCE: The wife of the Secretary of State. Cyrus Vance. So we took Mrs. Vance out to visit the pyramids and then we had to be back, those of us who were going to the concert, by 6:15, and of course to get around in Mexico City traffic is really an ordeal. And that night, after the concert, the Ambassador was having a dinner for President and Mrs. Carter and they needed somebody to put on a dinner for the other people that couldn't be included in that dinner, so my husband very kindly offered that we would do that.

Q: Uh-oh.

PRYCE: (laughs) So I had a dinner at 9:15 after the 6:15 concert and got kind of caught in traffic getting back to the house and arrived and was greeted at the door by Jody Powell and Stuart Eisinger, Carter's key advisors. Jody Powell was his spokesperson. Then as it turned out, my husband had gotten caught up in negotiating a communiqué^{1/2} and he never did get to the house for the party, so I had to do it all myself!

Q: (laughing) Oh my, my, my.

PRYCE: But anyway, it worked out fine, but it was a very hectic time. It was very exciting.

Q: Yes. You indirectly answered my question there, thinking back to the first time when President Kennedy visited. That was your first post, so your husband was a junior officer, whereas when President Carter visited Mexico in 1979, he was the Political Counselor. Obviously the level of his duties increased.

PRYCE: Absolutely.

Q: Very interesting. Joan, I'm now looking at all these posts you've had in Latin America. Mexico, Panama, Guatemala, and so on. But you did go to Moscow and you mentioned that earlier. How would you compare your Moscow experience to all your accumulated Latin American experiences?

PRYCE: Well Moscow has to be unique, and certainly as part of the Soviet Union it was a very unique experience, because it was really a police state and everything was run by the government. I don't think anybody coming from a democratic society can possibly imagine what that's like without seeing it. You can read about it, but you can never realize until you experience it. And so I think that that certainly had to be our most interesting tour. And as far as the Latin American countries go, even though they're all considered in one region, the Latin American region, they're all very, very different. You can contrast one with another.

But certainly the Soviet Union was by far the most unusual experience we had. Going into the Soviet Union I was really afraid we were just going to disappear behind the Iron Curtain and never be heard of again because I felt like we were the enemy, and once you got to the Soviet Union, they could just do anything. In reality, you feel very safe there. We felt very safe because they watched you all the time and they didn't want anyone who wasn't supposed to be associating with a foreigner to associate with you. So you felt very protected in a way. So you felt like if it wasn't planned, it wasn't going to happen.

Q: Interesting.

PRYCE: And you spend a lot of time trying to get around all of that, too.

Q: That was back in '66 to...

PRYCE: '68. Very much the Cold War and a very closed society. No tourists to speak of except from the Eastern Bloc countries. I think there was only one foreign business person there.

(End of tape I)

Q: We were talking about Moscow and how that post compared to your other Latin American posts. I noticed here that you mentioned there was a radiation problem in the Embassy in Moscow.

PRYCE: Yes. Actually that was interesting because it was a problem that came out years after we had served in Moscow. As you know, that was a very sensitive post and there was a lot of intelligence work that went on both ways in Moscow. What happened was, we received a survey from the State Department asking us about our health and various health conditions that we might have had or our family, our children and so forth, might have experienced in those years after serving in Moscow. And that was because it had come out that actually the State Department had known that the Embassy had received radiation. In trying to pick up communications, the Soviets had beamed some kind of radiation on the Embassy building itself and they felt that there might be health problems as a result of that.

They never proved anything conclusively that people were affected by it, but the people that served in Moscow during those years felt that there were a number of cases of people who had cancer, various types of cancer. Some children were born at that period who had learning disabilities or were handicapped in some way or another.

Q: Really? These are children of Foreign Service families?

PRYCE: Children of Foreign Service families. So there was always conjecture that it might be related to the radiation. So that was quite a worry I think and some people felt very strongly that perhaps these things were due to the radiation, but nothing was ever proved. But I think that's always something that people should be aware of, that kind of risk. There was a feeling that perhaps the Department should have notified people, let them know that they might be subjected to that.

That was a situation where many of the Embassy families actually lived in the same building where they worked. The offices that would be subjected to that kind of surveillance were in the same building with residential apartments. We happened to have lived outside of the Embassy building so I don't think that we would have been affected in any way. Perhaps my husband might have been, working in the Embassy. The only thing that I ever noticed is that when we went to some receptions and so on in the building, sometimes you heard a ringing (laughs) which was very strange, you know.

Q: A giant microwave.

PRYCE: Yes. So I don't know. It was a matter of conjecture.

Q: Did a lot of people live outside the Embassy in Moscow?

PRYCE: Quite a few lived outside, although the then Soviet government put all diplomatic families in about six different buildings in the city of Moscow, and that is so that they could monitor their coming and going. And they always had what we call "militzia" or the policemen at the entrance of each apartment to control who went in and who came out. But they were actually KGB. In a regular police uniform, but they were KGB.

Q: So they were both watching you, the Americans ...

PRYCE: Yes, and any Soviets that might try to get in. But of course Soviets didn't get in. Occasionally we did have Soviets come to our apartment, but we would meet them outside on the street somewhere and then actually accompany them past the guards so that they could get in. But we know that when they left, they were followed and probably often picked up and questioned and so on. So there was a certain risk, definitely, in coming to an American apartment at that time and some people, of course, would never have done it. But there were some people who were apolitical, I think, very interested in American culture and so on, who took that risk to come.

Q: It was pretty controlled though.

PRYCE: It was very controlled. In fact these "militzia" outside the building, when you first arrived, every time you would leave the apartment building they would go into their little box and call up on the phone and say, "She's leaving and it's 10:30 in the morning." And if you arrived at the Embassy in twenty minutes, they'd say, "That's okay. She didn't stop anywhere. She went directly to the Embassy."

And they would time you. And if it took you an hour - they figured you're probably going to the Embassy because that's where everything took place. Most people didn't have anything that they were doing within the city. And if it took you an hour to get to the Embassy, then they began to follow you to see what you were doing.

Q: But you had a lot of outside contact, I imagine, through doing ballet and, there was something else, studying Russian.

PRYCE: Yes. It was very difficult to have outside contacts, but I did meet Soviets. We had three children and I used to take them for walks and go to the parks and take American magazines and sit on a park bench, and pretty soon some Soviet women would come and sit on the bench next to me. And then they would start asking questions and I would give them magazines and so on. I did get to make a lot of contact with Soviets, but never on an ongoing basis.

Through my husband we made other contacts that we did keep up with. Some of the artists and people in the theater community and so on were willing to take some risks in associating with foreigners. But many of the meetings that we had with people were where we would meet them out in the woods and have a picnic, or meet them at some location where we made sure we weren't followed before we met them.

Q: I see. Joan, looking at your Superior Award for Evacuation, I would like you to comment on some of these threats that we in the Foreign Service families face when we are overseas, and also about the evacuation program that exists in FLO.

PRYCE: Well, as you know, the number of evacuations has greatly increased. In 1991, I think the Department budgeted for perhaps two evacuations and we had twenty-six out of the Middle East. And then we've had a number of evacuations out of the African coast because of civil conflict. So the number of evacuations has greatly increased. So more and more we're finding families that have experienced that, whereas it used to be very unusual. There were other terrorist activities that went on and still do go on, especially in Latin America. The bombings and kidnapping and that kind of thing. The plane hijackings have diminished, but they used to be more prevalent. So Foreign Service families have always been at risk because of terrorism and because of civil conflict. And I think the evacuation situation is probably the most prevalent case at the present time.

What FLO does basically is try to prepare people for evacuations. We have a wonderful brochure called "Don't Leave Home Without It," an evacuation plan. And it outlines exactly how you should be prepared to leave a post if you're called on to leave in twelve or twenty-four hours or what have you. What papers you need to take with you. Your medical records, power of attorney, your bank records, your passport, your shot record, and your school record for your children. All those things. Your driver's license. Things that people often forget. And how to close up a house and how to leave things in good order. So there are preparations that can be taken. There's also a great deal of stress, of course, that goes along with these evacuations and there is information on that. And there is support and help for people who go through those stressful situations.

And we're doing more and more in that vein, of providing counseling and providing resource people to help with evacuated families. And specifically in the Family Liaison Office, our role has been more to be in contact with families. Either the evacuated families or families of employees who are at a difficult post. So we do a lot of the communications support of family members. And we try to answer questions for them. They have questions about allowances, about schooling, about housing, all kinds of questions. Pets has become a big issue. Pets are certainly a part of a Foreign Service family and we've done a lot of research into how to get pets out of a country and that kind of thing.

Q: After the owners have left.

PRYCE: Get them back into the United States. Yes, after the owners have left, or in an evacuation, how you can evacuate the pets as well. So, anyway, there are a lot of questions that come up and so we work very closely with those families to try and work those things out.

Q: I just have to say this. I know a young couple of who bought something like a backpack for their dog specifically for the evacuation situation.

PRYCE: Oh really? That's a great idea! (laughs)

Q: So in case they had to leave in an emergency, they'd just stuff the dog in the backpack and put it on their back.

PRYCE: Isn't that wonderful? That's great.

Q: I don't know whether it would work.

PRYCE: We need to revise our brochure. That's a great idea.

Q: Yes, I thought that was pretty funny. But there are a number of other kinds of threats. Obviously in your experience, too, you had to encounter some of these.

PRYCE: I think one of the most difficult posts as far as threats was Guatemala and that was political violence where the right and the left were really at war. They were killing each other off through terrorist activities. A lot of journalists were killed and professors. Before we arrived, Ambassador Mein had been assassinated, the American ambassador. He had tried to escape from a kidnapping and was assassinated. While we were there the German Ambassador was assassinated and so there were great security precautions taken for all the embassy officials.

Families were not so much threatened. It wasn't considered macho in the Guatemalan society to attack women and children. So families didn't feel as threatened, but the officers had to be very careful and they were definitely targeted sometimes.

Q: But I suppose it doesn't matter what the situation is, what kind of terrorist activity was going on. The Evacuation Program was still able to take care of people when they come back to...

PRYCE: That's right. I think the State Department has been very successful in developing a good program and knowing how to get planes in. In the case of the last evacuation, Monrovia where they had to send the Marines in, they really have become very knowledgeable about how and when to do those things. But it's never easy. In most posts, families feel that they really want to stay. They're used to a certain threat level and they feel that they can function, and they don't want to leave their home, their school, their post. They don't want to leave the employee behind. So they tend to want to stay longer than what the Department usually feels is safe.

Q: I see. Let's just quickly outline the steps in an evacuation. When something is going to happen, how does FLO work with that process?

PRYCE: Well, we work on the task force. When it looks like an evacuation is going to take place, usually a task force is set up. And then one of the first things that has to be done is identifying who are the people who are going to come out. We're primarily interested in the family members. The spouse, the children, the ages of the children, the make-up of the family and so on.

So we work on developing accurate lists of those people and then we work out who are the contact points in the States. If they have a relative in Washington or in Kentucky or in Alabama, we want to know the name, the relationship, the address, the phone number, and so on, of that person so that when they're coming out, we can advise that person that they are in London or they are in New York and they will be in Georgia at a certain date and so on. We also keep track of their travel plans if possible, although we often don't know those things. But that's basically the main first step that we take.

And then when they come in, we set up an information center. If we get hotel reservations, we try to reserve a block of hotel space so that an incoming flight of evacuees will have a place to stay. And then we'll set up an information center at the hotel where they can get information about onward travel, about allowances, about health from the medical unit, and so on. And if they need some kind of counseling because of stress, there's somebody available to help with that.

We often set up a room for child care where we have somebody who can take care of young children at the hotel so that the parents are then free to go around and get themselves set up as to their travel or make whatever phone calls, or if they need to go to the Department to do things, that there is some kind of facility to help with child care and so on. So we try to think of all the things that can help in the evacuation.

I know when they evacuated El Salvador, I believe it was in December - I can't remember the year, it would have been '89 or '90 - and the people came out without winter clothing so they were coming from Salvador in short shorts and short-sleeved shirts, so we collected up a lot of sweaters and scarves and coats and hats and gloves and so on. People were wonderful to donate them. Some of the former CLOs got together and found clothing and brought it to the hotel, so we were able to give them coats and sweaters in some cases at the plane, in some cases at the hotel.

Q: So at what point - I gather that the hotel you were talking about would be in Washington, DC?

PRYCE: Yes, usually in Rosslyn. We have used Rosslyn.

Q: And so they obviously cannot stay there indefinitely.

PRYCE: No they can't. And usually they will go and stay with family or friends. So they may be here for two or three days in Washington. And then if they decide that they're going to stay in Washington, there is an allowance that covers them getting a temporary apartment, usually with cooking facilities and so on.

Q: Or otherwise they go stay with a family.

PRYCE: Usually they go and stay with a family.

Q: At a time like that, you need somebody with you, obviously.

PRYCE: Right, right.

Q: Do they in general go back to post or not?

PRYCE: Of course that varies. Often they do go back to post. What we find is they're usually out a lot longer than they think they're going to be. When they leave, they think, "Oh this will be over in two weeks or a month and I'll be back at post." And sometimes they may not go back at all, and sometimes they may not go back for six months, so the problems with evacuation really can grow. They have to make a decision to buy a car sometimes. Where they're going to live. It may not be convenient to stay with family for an extended period of time.

Then they have to look into schooling for children. Shall they enroll their children where their parents live, or should they come back to Washington if they think the employee might be coming back here for an assignment? There are a lot of really serious questions, and it's never easy.

Q: That's where the planning comes in that you mentioned right at the beginning.

PRYCE: That's where the planning begins. We've had people who were trying to buy a house. The spouse is here trying to buy a house and has to get a power of attorney from the employee who is still at post and get the financial information. It's very complicated. We do a lot of that communicating through cables and through phone lines in the task force to try and resolve a lot of those family issues. And of course the employee, who has remained at post, is much better equipped to do his job if he knows his or her family are being taken care of. So it serves a very useful purpose to have the Family Liaison Office involved.

Q: What about the foreign-born spouses in the evacuation situation?

PRYCE: That has become another very apparent issue because as the evacuations increased, there was a regulation that required that all family members must come to the United States. It has now been approved that foreign-born spouses, if they have family in another country and they're more comfortable going there to Brazil or to Japan or to wherever it is, that they are able to do it. It has to be approved by the Department, still, but it has been approved, and foreign-born spouses are able to go where their families are located. And that's something that our office was in the forefront of advocating for that.

Q: Good.

PRYCE: That there was no reason to send somebody to the United States if they had no support unit at all and they may never have lived here. I mean they would really be at a loss. It didn't make any sense at all.

Q: And they would still get the same allowance wherever they choose to be.

PRYCE: I'm not real sure about how the allowances work, but I would guess they would get some allowance. Perhaps it's adjusted.

Q: I see. Well, we have covered a lot of ground here, Joan. (laughter) A couple of things. One, what's the most memorable for you?

PRYCE: The most memorable? Oh my. Oh dear. I guess I would have to say the most memorable experience would have had to have been living in Moscow because it was the most unique. And I went with some pre-conceived ideas. You know, for example when I mentioned that I thought we would just disappear.

Q: You didn't. You're still here!

PRYCE: We're still around. And that I wouldn't like the Soviets. We made some wonderful friends in Moscow and I also felt that you could make a real contribution to kind of opening things up in a very tiny little way just by learning to speak the language and trying to talk to people who had never seen an American before, had no idea what it was like to live in the United States, the kind of freedom that we had and the tremendous restrictions that they lived under, and had really no understanding of basic freedoms. And to be able to try to communicate that to just a person that you might meet in the park or at the theater or in a plane in a brief conversation, that you could really somehow plant a little seed there. I think that that's probably the most memorable experience. And that that was really a great country. It had a very interesting history. Wonderful art, wonderful architecture in places like Leningrad and the old wooden buildings out in the countryside. Wonderful music and dance, a very high level of culture.

Q: Literature? It's tremendous.

PRYCE: Tremendous. There was so much there. It was such a rich culture. And yet under really adverse circumstances as far as their political scene was concerned. So I would say that was the most memorable experience.

Q: I guess sometimes we forget that just as we have preconceived ideas about some country, they too have the same of us. You as an American, me as a Chinese person. And if we can do something to help open that up, it would certainly be nice.

PRYCE: That's true.

Q: How about the converse of that, Joan? What's the least happy moment?

PRYCE: Well that's very hard to say, too. In fact, I wouldn't even, as far as a country goes. I found them all interesting and wouldn't trade any of them. I thought that all of our experiences were very good.

Probably the most difficult situation for me was Guatemala because of the terrorism and the constant threat of violence, and the fact that because my husband was the Political Counselor in Guatemala, we knew people on the left and we knew people on the right. We knew people who were assassinated and that was very, very difficult to live constantly with that threat, and to know that people that you knew, that you considered to be friends, were apt to be killed, and in reality some of them were killed. That was very, very difficult. It was like a nightmare, living in a nightmare sometimes.

Q: It's interesting. It's always that human factor that counted most. It wasn't the country, it wasn't the difficult situation. The water wasn't good, or the garbage was terrible, but it's that human contact that means the most.

PRYCE: Absolutely. That's an interesting point. I hadn't thought about it in those terms. That's right.

Q: Well how about looking forward to going overseas now since you're waiting to hear about your new assignment to Honduras?

PRYCE: Honduras, right.

Q: Now, after six years in the States and after many, many posts also, what do you look forward to most?

PRYCE: We do look forward to Honduras. We've had a number of friends who have served there and really enjoyed it. What they told us is that it's a wonderful country. The people are very open and very friendly and that you make very lasting friendships with Hondurans. That they really are a very friendly and very open people that accept you, and you can become very good friends with the Hondurans.

It's a country where there's a lot that needs to be done, I think where we can help. It's a very poor country. They have great needs in the fields of education and in health. We have a very large AID mission there which does a lot with working on those issues, and we have a very large Peace Corps mission, I think about 250 Peace Corps people in Honduras. So there are a lot of American assistance programs there which is very good.

And historically it's a very interesting country because they have the old Mayan civilizations and they have preserved Mayan ruins there and some of the colonial architecture still exists and so on, so historically it's also a very interesting country. And it has a very pleasant climate. Tegucigalpa is about 3000 feet and it has wonderful agriculture and palm trees and pine trees, which is an interesting combination. And it's mountainous with very good beaches and so on. So there's a variety of scenery and we're really looking forward to going.

Q: Good. What will your husband be doing?

PRYCE: Actually he's been designated as the Ambassador to Honduras.

Q: Oh I didn't know! Congratulations!

PRYCE: Yes, surprise!

Q: Oh my, my, my. I didn't know. That's very nice! I'm so happy for you.

PRYCE: So we still have to go through confirmation, but we expect to go in February.

Q: Oh my! Mrs. Ambassador. Oh wonderful!

PRYCE: A new role here.

Q: That is great. I was just about to ask you, "Well, what are you going to be doing Joan?"
(laughter) Well what do you think you're going to be doing Joan?

PRYCE: Well, I don't know. We'll have to see. It's sort of a wait and see which is kind of ironical because in talking to Foreign Service spouses, I tell them, "You must plan ahead and prepare and set goals and do all this research." But I really want to get down and see what the lay of the land is and where I can most effectively make use of my time. I would expect that I'll do some volunteer work, but I'd like to find one particular area that I can concentrate in and not just do a lot of small little projects and be kind of spread all over the map, but really try to concentrate on a certain area. So we'll see. What a thing.

Q: That certainly is very exciting because now you have so many years of experience and you know the region very well. And you have also helped a lot of Foreign Service families through FLO and through the employment program. You're in a great position to do something really, not only for the country, but also for the future Foreign Service families in the region.

PRYCE: Right, right. And it is a large mission, so I look forward to working.

Q: How large?

PRYCE: Well I think including the AID and Peace Corps, I think it's around 600, something like that. So it is fairly large. So I look forward to working with a lot of the mission projects, too, but we'll see.

Q: Wonderful! So you're waiting basically for President Clinton?

PRYCE: Actually yes. Because we have to wait until after the Inauguration for Congress to come back into session, the new Congress. And then hopefully we'll be able to schedule hearings, probably at the end of January or February sometime. And then go fairly soon after we're confirmed.

Q: So you're taking care of a lot of things now here in DC?

PRYCE: Right. A lot of things that you let go until the last minute. (laughs) We all do.

Q: Oh yes, yes. I know that feeling, too. Now just one last thing, and that is how do your children feel about this exciting prospect?

PRYCE: Well they really think it's wonderful. They're grown and they're independent now. They all three live in Washington. One's in graduate school and two of them are working. And they greatly look forward to coming to visit. It's kind of interesting, in all the moving around, I worried about raising children in the Foreign Service. We've talked to them about it now, and they all three feel that they had a wonderful life and that they really feel it was far more beneficial to have been raised in the Foreign Service than it would have been to stay in one place and attend a normal progression of schools. That they gained a lot more from the experience than they lost. And that's gratifying. And they all speak Spanish. The three of them are bilingual, so they would look forward to coming to visit in Honduras.

Q: Good, good. There is a lot to look forward to. Oh my, my, my. I can't believe it! You didn't even tell me, Joan! I knew you were going to Honduras.

PRYCE: A big surprise!

Q: So instead of me surprising you with the last couple of questions, you surprised me! (laughter) This is wonderful. I'm really, really happy for you.

PRYCE: Oh, thank you very much Monique.

Q: I thank you for giving me an opportunity to interview you for the Foreign Service Spouse Oral History. And I think we really have covered a lot of very important topics and the contributions that you've made in the Foreign Service. And it's not over yet. And I hope that maybe in a few years, maybe longer than that, we can talk again.

PRYCE: Yes, I hope so too. And thank you very much Monique. I really enjoyed talking with you, as usual.

Q: Oh, well, the feeling is mutual.

PRYCE: It's nice that you're doing this. It really is.

Q: Yes, I enjoy it. Great.

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: William T. Pryce

Spouse's Position: Political Officer

Spouse Entered Service:1958Left Service: Active dutyYou Entered Service:Same

Status:Spouse

Malden Name: Joan Mary MacClurg

Parents (Name, Profession):

Alfred J. MacClurg, Jr., insurance

Mabel Ellen MacClurg, interior designer

Schools: University of Colorado, B.S. Business, 1955.

Profession: retail; administrator; program management

Children:

Kathy

Jeffrey

Scott

Positions held (Please specify Volunteer or Paid): 1958, Security Officer, MAAG Institute (Defense Intelligence Agency), Washington, DC (paid); Hospital de la Mujer, Mexico City, 1961-1963 (volunteer); Elementary school, Washington, DC, 1963-1966 (volunteer); Women's Club, Moscow, 1966-68 (volunteer); 1968-1971 Retail Store Manager, Panama Canal Company; Administrative Assistant, Census Bureau, Panama (paid); 1971-1974, PTA President, school board member, school; (volunteer), 1978-1981, Administrator, Employees Association, Mexico City (paid); 1981-1982, Diplomatic Women's Club and Embassy Women's Club, La Paz (volunteer); 1982-1986, Management Assistant, Panama Canal Commission (paid); International Charity Board member (volunteer); Board member, orphanage (volunteer), Panama; 1986-1992, FLO, Employment Program Coordinator; church (volunteer) Washington, DC

Honors (Scholastic, FS): Superior Honor Award, Employment Program; Superior Honor Award (Group) - Evacuation