

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

SUE (HELEN) C. LOW

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INTERVIEW

Q: Sue Low was for several years chairman of a study group of the Association of

American Foreign Service Women which developed a concept that eventually came to be called the "Foreign Service Associates". It is in that context that I am interviewing her today.

LOW: To give just a few indications from my personal experience of the kinds of events that colored the development of my thinking: Our experience goes back to 1957 when we went to help open the post in Kampala at the very beginning of the program to open posts in independent Africa. It was to be a two-man post and Steve was the junior officer.

I was the only spouse although there were four children, including our newly born firstborn. That conditioned my experience -- that there was no one at all to look to as a role model.

Q: This was your first experience of the Foreign Service?

LOW: This was our first posting abroad. And we were just setting up the consulate so that even such unlikely questions crossed my mind -- we arrived with the Great Seal of the U.S. in one arm and our son in the other, wondering, "Should I press the flag? It has so many wrinkles in it." Nobody to ask anything of. But at that post, as in all the others, it was a matter of our wanting to move out into the community and get to know people. That was a major part of the job to be done. And it was clearly a joint job for both of us.

Q: How big was the community?

LOW: Kampala at that point was not very large and Uganda was a completely African country. Unlike Kenya and Tanganyika, as it then was, no non-Africans could own land and so there had been few of them there. If it had not been for Makerere College, we really could not have gotten below the surface of things. It was a matter of getting to know the African community essentially.

Q: What other nationalities were represented there at the time?

LOW: Just a very few. The senior member of the diplomatic corps -- there were maybe four countries represented -- was the Sudanese consul general. The Indians had an assistant high commissioner and we had a consul. I believe that was all when we arrived. So it was a matter of plunging in without many guidelines to get to know the community.

Q: Had the people who were there of other nationalities had longer experience than you in Africa? Of course, the Sudanese, it goes without saying.

LOW: The Sudanese would have. I don't really know whether the Indian had.

Q: The British ...

LOW: The British, of course, were the governing power. It was a British protectorate.

They were the only non-Africans who were there, essentially. They and the resident Indian community that had come in to build the railway up from Mombasa at the turn of the century.

In that post I did have some working experience, one of two times that I worked for the mission. The one and only American secretary went home on leave and I was drafted to do some of the kinds of things she handled.

Our second post was Senegal. I won't dwell on that one. That was at the time of their independence.

The third post after several years back in Washington was Brasilia at a time when the whole diplomatic community was still in Rio because the foreign minister was there. About five countries had one or two people in Brasilia because the President, the Congress and the Supreme Court were there. We had four or five officers in our embassy office. There again, it was a matter of plunging into the community, speaking Portuguese day and night. There were two facets that are relevant to my experience as a spouse. On the volunteer side: I was a member of the school board and the last of my years, as chairman, we had to produce an instant high school; it was to go into operation just after we left because the Brazilians were requiring all diplomats to be resident in Brasilia. Ours was the only non-Portuguese-speaking school at that time. So not only the American children whose families would be moving up from Rio but children of other diplomats were interested in attending. We had to expand from eight grades to twelve -- buildings, curricula, textbooks, the whole bit had to be planned and executed. I suppose that was my most significant volunteer experience there.

Q: That is what I would call large scale volunteer experience!

LOW: Well, it had to happen. It was exciting but difficult.

On the side of requirements that are imposed on spouses to do the entertaining: Steve was the principal officer so it was incumbent on us to see that these things happened. There were no catering services or anything of that sort and we wouldn't have had the funds in any case.

Q: Was that because funds were limited?

LOW: Funds are always limited. In the embassy building there was a sort of snack bar. So we had the facilities to prepare a meal and the Brazilian woman who ran the snack bar could help. But it was something else again to put on a big reception. Even to find enough plates and dishes to lay out the buffet tables. The one I remember as most onerous was when the admiral of the southern region wanted to host a dinner when he visited. We found ourselves putting on a buffet dinner for 150 people. Even then, 1969 -- before the Directive on Wives -- I felt strongly that it wasn't right, that you couldn't require people to help; you could try to enlist their enthusiasm and cooperation but that was as far as I was

prepared to go. That was one of the most exhausting single experiences I had. But it gave me a good feel for what was being demanded of spouses out of their own good will.

Q: Did you get help on that occasion from other spouses who were at the post?

LOW: No. And that is a painful story. I didn't get as much as I might have expected from people who were directly involved. I can see that the peripheral people might not volunteer but even those directly involved didn't.

Q: Did that include military personnel?

LOW: Yes, it did. That occasion made it very clear to me that the demands that were being made were really excessive, that there was no way ... We did it -- but we couldn't -- if you see what I mean. It was more than we really could handle. There were a number of other similar occasions while we were there but that is the one that stands out in my mind most forcefully.

Then after several years back in Washington, we found ourselves in Zambia at the time the Rhodesian question was being sorted out. One of the two groups of the Patriotic Front, the groups of local African leaders who were trying to see that Rhodesia became Zimbabwe, was headquartered in Lusaka. There were a number of work sessions there in which Steve was involved. His second hat, besides being ambassador, was that of the American accompanying the eight successive British missions trying to resolve the problem. They went around in a giant circle, talking to all five Front Line states, to Nigeria, to South Africa, to the British, to the Americans. When they would come through Lusaka (including Steve whom I only saw on these occasions for a while), there were always work sessions with Joshua Nkomo and other elements, and with the British.

Also going on at the same time was the effort to resolve the Namibian situation. Again, frequently we would have visits to Lusaka from Don McHenry who was handling that for the U.S. in the UN. The representatives in Lusaka of all the other countries that were members of the council would come and various Namibians from time to time. So while there was a considerable amount of entertaining, it was focused on those working sessions at our residence. Whether it was dinner or lunch, they were working sessions and only they were there. But we had to service them and all their needs. Much of the time I had no cook at all and very limited help, limited in their capacity to comprehend what was going on in terms of taking any initiative or in my being able to turn my back for a minute, to say, "This is what we did last month; we want to do the same thing now."

Q: How many people were in the group you were having to do for?

LOW: The groups varied but normally ten to fifteen people.

Q: But repeatedly ...

LOW: We had no sooner arrived than Secretary of State Kissinger came on a visit. Very often we had visits that would involve Andy Young or other high ranking members of the administration. Joshua Nkomo was a frequent participant in these sessions. So it was a matter of wanting to do things nicely and without interrupting their train of thought.

Q: Unobtrusively.

LOW: And also done, I might add, with limited resources because everything was in very short supply. Zambia was badly hampered, being a landlocked country, and at one point wars were going on on all four sides of them. To produce the meals took a certain amount of ingenuity.

Q: I'm tempted to want to ask you, of course, but I know it's probably not wholly relevant to this: How did you manage? Where did the food -- that could have been presented in a suitable fashion -- come from?

LOW: Well, that is a long story. So let's not go into that.

But two other facets of life there from my point of view: One, we knew very little about Zambia when we first arrived. There had just been almost a complete turnover at the embassy. So one of the things, again in a volunteer way, that I did with the help of a woman in USIS was to organize a series of seminars on Zambian life for anyone who was interested in taking part. For all of us it was a very rewarding experience to begin to have some understanding of how ...

Q: Was this just for embassy personnel?

LOW: It was, actually, although essentially the only American community there were missionaries and I believe that some of them participated. Certainly some of them helped us set up some of the topics of the series.

The third factor was working -- in a wage-earning way. We had just come from Washington where I had been doing research and writing on a wide range of subjects at the Overseas Development Council. I had written a piece on the Panama Canal treaty which was then under consideration and an article that appeared in Current History on the energy perspectives of the non-oil-producing developing countries. This was in 1975 when they felt the crunch much more than even we did in this country. I did quite a bit of research on the external debt of these countries, the way it was increasing, and the various IMF mechanisms to help them bridge the gap, and with the UNCTAD Common Fund which they saw as helping stabilize commodity prices. There was a very small embassy group in Zambia when we arrived: the economic officer was also the commercial officer and he had a third responsibility, too, which as I recall was the AID side of things. So the embassy hired me to work under contract on some of the questions that pertained to these areas I have just mentioned since Zambia was much involved in third world economic initiatives.

Q: Who were the sources for the questions you were asking?

LOW: The questions were from Washington about the Zambian position on the topics at the Paris Economic Conference in part. As background I had with me the various data I had brought, not knowing that it would be so relevant. Also I was in a position to ask for certain kinds of useful data not available in our little embassy nor in Zambia.

Q: In other words, your function in the embassy didn't extend to your talking with officials ...

LOW: I didn't talk with government officials for the most part; the economic officer did that. I was just under contract to do the research but I could fill in the background for him and could discuss the nuances of the points as well as the broader issues.

Q: I assume he was overjoyed.

LOW: We worked together very well. I trust so. He certainly didn't complain. Then they asked me -- every year the Commerce Department does an economic survey of the various countries. I did the economic survey for Zambia that year. People wrote from Washington to say that it was unusually thorough and helpful. So that is the sum total of my work experience abroad in our thirty-one-year career in the Foreign Service.

Q: Your earlier work experience was at a staff level -- let's put it that way ...

LOW: It was pinch-hitting for the only American secretary when she went home on leave. That was the only other time. And that was just for a few months while she was gone.

Q: How long did this professional experience ...

LOW: Just for one year.

Then we found ourselves in Lagos. Again, back to the entertaining. The Nigerian military had laid the framework and had just handed back power to the civilians. At the same time they had moved from a parliamentary to a congressional form of government.

Q: This was the end of 1979?

LOW: That was October 1979. We had been there less than three weeks when a group from our Armed Forces Committee was going through on a visit. It was just too good an opportunity to miss to get them together with the Nigerian legislators who were brand new to a congressional form and had dozens of questions. It was just a perfect time to get a good interaction. So -- we had a sit-down dinner for a hundred and some people after we had been there less than three weeks. Clearly one wouldn't normally choose to do that but you have to do these things when the opportunity presents itself. And Steve tells me it

was a very useful and helpful occasion all around. But it was a real nightmare for me because I didn't even know how many forks we had when I started to plan the menu nor what food materials were available. The staff, although they had been there for some time, well -- just to illustrate that: After that party, looking down the inventory, I saw a huge new damask tablecloth for the table when all laid out twenty feet long; I couldn't find it anywhere, and when I asked the steward where it was, he said it was still in the laundry; I said, "But we haven't used it yet!" What they had done was to fold it up small and put it across the rough hewn plywood over wooden horses as their bar.

Another facet of my life in Nigeria was again wanting to get to know the country as well as possible. The avenue for doing that in earlier years had been through the museum but the study group there was moribund. I wanted to find some way in which any of the spouses who wanted to could join me -- I could open doors -- and together we could get to know people and establish real contact. What happened was the setting up of a group, half Nigerian, half non-Nigerian, with the original purpose primarily of studying Nigerian literature. But it moved well beyond that. The group started quite small but, like an amoeba, it split in half. Shortly after we left it had split into five parts. And to this day, which is six or seven years later, it is still going strong. People who have had long experience in the Foreign Service have said to me that it was one of their best tours because they did get to know people well.

Q: Was this -- I won't say exclusively -- but primarily for women?

LOW: At this point it was for women because that was just the way ... Not all the women, of course, were free to come because they were working. And it was not just American women. Many in the diplomatic corps were very much interested in being part of it. But one of the most interesting aspects was that for the Nigerian women, too, it proved very interesting. There are so many diversities in that country; the Yoruba women, for instance, don't know the tradition of the Ibo women and the Hausa-Fulani. It was a setting in which they could come together, get to know each other as friends, and discuss their various ways of doing things in their various cultures. Often we non-Nigerians would just sit back and listen, enchanted, as the dialogue among them [went on].

Q: How big a group was this, not necessarily now, but then?

LOW: It could only be a certain size before it had to split.

About fifteen was the optimum maximum and then another group would form.

So those, not so much in a nutshell as I had intended, are the kinds of experiences that I have had as a spouse and on which I drew in trying to sort out where we could go from here to make the Foreign Service a viable life style over the period of the career of the employee in this age which increasingly consists of two-income families and of spouses, male and female, who have no intention of just sitting on the sidelines and cooling their heels for -- thirty years.

Q: So you came back then to find that in the meantime, perhaps not unknown to you, there had been certain developments in which you were interested and became very interested as time went on.

LOW: When I came back, Sue Parsons had just taken charge of the Association of American Foreign Service Women. She was president and was looking for someone to work with her closely on a number of programs under the umbrella of the Forum. The two of us spent two very full and productive years working jointly on a number of projects, coordinating a dedicated group of AAFSW members.

One project concerned teenagers and their re-entry -- alerting families to the problems they face and, secondly, what kinds of institutional measures might be possible that might ease their transition, and encouraging the teenagers to set up their own group. Another was on education and this, of course, was of considerable interest in the Foreign Service community. We ended up working on a questionnaire that was sent to all Foreign Service personnel abroad and their families who had children in school. A third element was the foreign-born spouses, trying to provide a framework in which those living in this country for the first time could be helped to get their bearings and could come to see their role as representing the U.S. when they went abroad again, to put them in a position to fill that role more happily. A fourth concern, which had been an unresolved issue for a long time, was the divorced spouses, not just those who had been left out of the compensation in the Foreign Service Act of 1980, but also the continuing problem of people divorcing and what we might be able to do to help them find a stable underpinning as they moved into a new "incarnation". The project on the front burner at that point was working with the "crisis" situations -- to call them "terrorist" situations was considered a little too extreme. I won't go into the background of that here, although it has a fascinating background. We pulled together a report for the Secretary of State; there were a number of people who worked closely on that. There was the group who had done the preliminary data, headed by Jean German. Let's leave that for another time.

Q: I think that might be better, yes.

LOW: And then the Crisis Report itself went to the Department, which, after an interval when a Task Force was appointed, reported back, setting in motion a dialogue and a series of changed perspectives that have had a profound and continuing effect. Incidentally, Hope, I think that would be worth a session, not just with me; there are two or three other people who were closely involved in that. [See the interview with Betty Atherton in this connection.]

But what had brought me into the Forum, when Sue asked me if I would be interested, the reason I said "yes", was because she was wanting to put together a group that would deal with the role of the spouse. And even though that didn't have front line attention because of the Crisis Report, that is where the impetus for change began -- with a group of people who gathered together maybe once a month to discuss spouse issues. Most of them were

the more senior people.

Q: That's interesting. I hadn't been aware that they were the more senior people.

LOW: Well at that stage it wasn't exclusively that, but many of them were. In terms of longevity as well as rank.

Q: Umm. I see. Was this under the aegis of ...

LOW: This was [the] AAFSW Forum. It was one of subjects for which Sue and I, as we worked on other things, gathered people together.

Q: Did you invite people to participate?

LOW: We publicized as widely as we could that this group was meeting at such and such time and place and DO COME. I remember in particular a morning meeting at Fran McClelland's house. It soon became clear that we were all exchanging our ideas of the way things were and the way people felt and someone, it may have been Penne Laingen, said, "You know, we really ought to do a questionnaire to find out how people do feel." So that then became the object of the exercise and a questionnaire was formed. Penne took a large role in doing that. We kept refining it and when summer came, decided that we needed to do it more professionally. Unlike the education questionnaire that we were sending out, we wanted this one to be able to be tabulated when it came back.

We wanted to get as professional advice as we could. So we talked to the Department of State which itself was very much interested in knowing what the attitude of spouses was but was precluded from asking such questions. They were themselves doing a demographic study of their employees but they didn't feel they could ask attitude questions even there, much less of spouses.

Q: Was this personnel?

LOW: In our discussions, we did talk with BEX [Board of Examiners]. But the basic group we worked with was the Director General's office and his immediate assistants. It was agreed that if we could get [the Una Chapman] Cox Foundation funding, they would provide a number of critical, logistical supports. They would pouch it out for us and return. And there were a number of other types of support. When we made our presentation to the Cox Foundation, it turned out that the two sets of contribution were roughly equal. What we were asking from Cox was funding for the pollster, compilation of data, analysis of the data and some other things. The AAFSW contribution, of course, was all the work that went into formulating the questionnaire with the expert, getting the questionnaires ready to mail, and handling it when it came back, all the interstices of working with the data. We asked Cox, as I recall, for somewhere around \$15,000. It was granted. And we set out on this adventure.

Four people worked very closely on it. Besides Sue and me, Penne Laingen who became co-chairman with Kathleen Boswell, a less senior wife. In putting together the proposal, Kathleen got the cost data together; she helped find the professional we finally chose and worked on the technical side of things. We managed to get the questionnaire out by late November, but inevitably it did reach some people during the Christmas holiday.

Q: What year was that then -- as far back as '82?

LOW: No, that would have been '83, November '83.

We were surprised and delighted by the response rate. Originally we had thought we would send out a second request but that didn't turn out to be practical. But the response rate was around 30 - 35 percent. And for one shot and going that far afield! Moreover, it was good distribution both geographically and in terms of the level of position of the employee spouse. So the data was compiled and put together in a preliminary way by that summer (1984). Penne wanted to write the report herself and gathered a group to help her; I didn't take part in that. Molly Beyer, the incoming president of AAFSW, asked if I would do a White Paper, as she called it, on some ideas that I was trying to shape on the spouse role to present to the AAFSW board in October.

Two other things were going on during this time frame. One was that the new Under Secretary for Management, Ron Spiers, had gathered around him a management council, one member of which was the Director General, Roy Atherton. Thanks in part to Betty Atherton, the spouses of this group also met and discussed developments that we considered important from the family point of view. So we had talked over the White Paper ideas a bit.

Q: Were you in that group as wife of the Director of FSI?

LOW: That's right. That's how I happened to be in that particular group. We included as resource people the director of the FLO office -- that was Marcia Curran initially and later Sue Parsons -- and of the OBC, Franchon Silberstein and later Jean German. And it included whoever of the senior spouses wanted to come. Initially, Marlene Eagleburger took part in it even though Larry was not a member of the management council and we were delighted to have her do so.

That brings me to another strand going on at the time, spearheaded by Marlene Eagleburger. Jean Newsom, when her husband was Deputy Secretary, as I understand it, had a series of brown bag lunches for the spouses of the Assistant Secretary level. That had evolved into a group concerned with the whole realm of the role of the senior spouse, the burden on her, which Marlene had experienced as wife of the ambassador in Yugoslavia. She had continued working on this with members of that group. Others, if they happened to be in town, would be included but in my experience with it, there would normally have been between six and eight people. I came in on the tail end of the project when they were struggling with the sixth or seventh version of what was to be draft

legislation to compensate spouses. It had come through a number of convolutions; each time there were insurmountable obstacles, it seemed, to whatever formula they would come up with. They had first thought of it for the most senior people. But I can't really speak to that because I wasn't around at that time. When I came on board they were talking about compensation for all spouses for going abroad. Even in the time I was there, it was modified. But Marlene finally said, "We've got to settle on something. Let's let this be it and we'll run with the ball."

Q: May I interrupt to ask you whether the changes came about in part because of consultations with people on the Hill who said, "This isn't practical?" Or would people in the Department in their turn say ...

LOW: I really can't say what happened before I came on board. But at the point I did, it became clear that there were fundamental problems with the form in which it had jelled; to begin with, you can't compensate non-employees. But she [Marlene Eagleburger] did talk with people on the Hill; several of us went with her to talk with Dante Fascell and others. She lined up some support and met some opposition. Her hope had been to hold a press conference in which there would be sponsors from both sides of the aisle in both houses. That never did happen. And I think we should leave that for another time too. There are other people who know much more than I do about the early phases. But it was part of the ferment and activity on facets of the spouse relationship.

So in September, I brought to the Wye Women's group (the Management Council spouses and resource people) the White Paper written for the AAFSW board. We went over it, made some changes, gave it a new name -- Patience Spiers said the name we were using, Spouse Corps, made her think too much of women in aprons wielding brooms. We talked from then on in terms of Foreign Service Associates.

The timing was just right. We presented it to the AAFSW board who approved the idea in principle. It just happened that Under Secretary Spiers and his Management Council met shortly thereafter at the Wye plantation and the spouses were invited to discuss our problems among ourselves. We had the ear of the management council on Sunday morning to present our proposal. Mr. Spiers had been acutely aware of the problems that are posed for the Service by the anomalies of the spouse role and, in fact, said two months later in a speech to AAFSW that he thought this was the most intractable of all Foreign Service problems -- not just this facet of it but the whole ...

Q: I remember that, yes.

LOW: So he was very receptive to the idea and decided to pursue it, to see whether it might be workable. So the proposal, just as it stood, was sent by the DG's office to all posts around the world for discussion and reply. About 78 percent of the posts were heard from, as I recall, which included most of the larger ones; in terms of numbers of people, it was larger than that. There were some skeptics but on the whole the response was that this idea was worth pursuing. Clearly the proposal was not spelled out in detail in terms

of how it would function. So there were many, many questions about "How could you do this" or "It isn't possible to do that" or whatnot. On the basis of these comments, we, essentially the Wye Women's group, put together ...

Q: And that consisted of Marcia Curran ...

LOW: No, she left in June and was replaced by Sue Parsons just as we were in the middle of the next phase which we called "A Sharper Focus". The whole picture had been -- you might call it -- one big ball of wax, and we separated it into the four different areas that needed to be addressed specifically. One was the serious volunteer -- because a number of people at post had pointed out that this was a much-needed function of great value that wasn't much appreciated. And they didn't want to see anything done that would further undermine it -- which was a very legitimate point. So ways of recognizing the serious volunteer became the first strand of our sharper focus. We were concerned, not just with giving a plaque or a certificate; we wanted it to be a tangible benefit. For instance, at that point USIA was not funding language training for spouses beyond some limited amount and AID wasn't sure it was going to be able to continue doing so. So we said, "This is the kind of support that volunteers should have when they go abroad so that they can interact with the community in a useful way."

The second strand was that of entertaining. We evolved a position that said: The mission should decide what level of this kind of outreach -- entertaining -- they were going to undertake and would be prepared to fund it fully; they would pay not just the cost of ingredients for a reception, let's say, but the time that went into planning and managing and executing that function. This would apply to any spouse, whether married to the most junior official or the most senior. If the spouse of the official who undertook to do this entertaining wanted to handle it herself/himself, she could. But the funds would also be there in case there was no spouse at post or she had a full time job or she just didn't enjoy doing this kind of thing; the funds would be there to handle it some other way. We felt that this would take a great burden off particularly the most senior spouses so that they could perhaps accept more gracefully their properly so-called "representational" role. The ambadress has all the other responsibilities of being in attendance either at her own functions or someone else's -- or standing at the airport in the pouring rain to welcome back the president of the country. All these things. (To date we have not moved further in our thinking about how she might be compensated. And as we were told on Capitol Hill, until the wife of the President of the United States receives a salary, there is not likely to be one for ambassadors' wives. We tried later within AAFSW to get a group together to address the representational question in both its aspects but unfortunately it faded away.)

The third strand -- but I'll leave that until last because that is what became the Foreign Service Associates proposal. The fourth strand was one that people in the Department picked up when we talked about employment. The FLO office was much interested in this; Marcia Curran in earlier years as an AAFSW volunteer had worked on the whole question of employment. The Department was concerned to find ways to utilize spouses to do the work of the mission in a supporting role; this was not meant in any sense to be

competitive with, much less to replace, the employees, but to fill in, in a variety of ways. In some cases this would be just to fill the interval between replacements. In other cases, for instance, where there was an overload of consular activity, spouses could take the regular consular training course and pass the same exams, that is, meet the same standards as the incoming junior officers, so they [can] fill in where needed. This does happen to some extent but the hope was that it could be more fully developed since the need is perennial. The possible openings were not limited to the consular corps. Certainly on the administrative side and also the political and economic, as my experience in the economic area would show, there are times when qualified supplementary help can be very useful. That was the idea they pursued.

The remaining strand was the one that became the Foreign Service Associates. It was designed to provide a framework within which spouses could use their professional skills in the sequence of countries in which they found themselves -- so that they wouldn't have to undergo the frustration, first of all, of just sitting on their hands in terms of using the skills they had acquired. And, moreover, so that they could take advantage of being in a country to get further insight into it than they could if they just went out and helped with a charity, let's say. We felt, and feel, that this is of great value to the mission itself. As we further refined the subject, it became clear to us that from the taxpayer's point of view this would be worthwhile. We visualized it as being a service corps. That is to say, you would be credentialed in your field and you would come in at the same rate of pay as anyone else whether you were a lawyer or an engineer or whatever you might be; we wouldn't try to figure out who was worth more in Ouagadougou. And there would be a way of working your way up by virtue of the number of years you took part in the program. We also saw that it would be useful when you came back to the U.S. in terms of looking for a job, you would be able to say, "I have functioned as a Foreign Service Associate" and the time would come when that would be a meaningful statement to an employer in the Washington area. But also you would be able to say to an employer, "I'm an environmental lawyer. When we were in Moscow and the Chernobyl accident occurred, I used my skills doing thus and such." It seemed to us that this would be of value to one's career. It should be. The object of the exercise was to get these two parts together, the skills and the opportunities. We also felt, as I said, that it would be very valuable to the mission because it would establish contact with a much wider range of the society than the mission encounters in the normal course of events and would thus add to the understanding of that country and, conversely, to that country's understanding of us.

We talked about this on the Hill both to a number of legislators and staffers. I think particularly of Pat Schroeder and her aide, Andrea Nelson. We talked to Congressman Mica and his staff; we caught him just as he came out of a meeting on the budget; he looked dazed and noted how grim the situation was. We talked to Dante Fascell and a number of other people on the House side. On the Senate side also, we talked with Senators and staffers, including Senator Mathias. To our surprise and delight, he said he wanted to introduce the proposal as an amendment on the floor when the Senate considered the State Department authorization bill. Which he did. And it was accepted. So in mid-August of 1985, a piece of legislation was enacted that instructed the Secretary

of State to design a pilot program to test the principle of the Foreign Service Associates and to report back to the Congress by the first of February, 1986, on the design of the pilot and on plans for its implementation.

The Department then appointed Sam Hart to head the Task Force to handle this. We, of course, were outsiders to the process. But FLO was involved. And Sam Hart's door proved to be open; we could talk with him about what we were trying to achieve and discuss, as the design developed, our perspective of where it could be made more adequate. In his first draft, before we talked to him, there was not one glimmer of the Foreign Service Associates. All that was there was the employment side, the fourth strand of employment within the mission, the one in which the Department was interested. But by the time the plan got put together and sent back to Congress, much had happened. The Foreign Service Associates concept did survive. It was not by any means the only thing that was included in the package. But it was there. Plans had been made for the Department to absorb the start-up costs so that by October of 1986, they would have been ready to employ people, the people chosen and ready to start. By the first of February the Department had a pretty good idea of the posts they would choose for the pilot. They would have liked to use ten of different sizes and in different geographical areas to really test the idea. Their plans, then, were pretty well along and they were all ready to swing into action. But two weeks after it was sent to the Hill, the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings limitations froze the whole funding picture for the State Department to the extent that it was just not possible to find even the small funds required for the pilot nor to start a project that would require further Congressional funding. We explored the idea a bit to be sure but it was clear that at that point in time with the level of stringency, when the Department was cutting back posts and personnel, there was no way that it would be possible -- or appropriate -- for us to pursue the matter. We are hopeful, of course, that its day will come.

[The] whole development shone a rather unflattering spotlight on the then existing policies of employment for family members, particularly for spouses -- which I won't go into -- what the inadequacies were, but they really were pretty bad in some instances. But the Department, unable to move ahead with the Foreign Service Associates plan did move ahead by appointing someone, a civil servant, to look at the whole set of existing policies and to make them more adequate and more consistent with themselves. Those who followed it more closely than I have been very pleased with the way it has developed.

Q: Where is her job location? Is she an employee ...

LOW: Yes, she is a State Department civil service employee in personnel. She was assigned to do this and has taken it very seriously; she has gone about it in a way that has drawn considerable admiration, I know, from the FLO office. They, of course, are in a better position to assess it than I am. But I don't know the details.

So I feel that even though we don't have the Associates yet, it has made a significant impact. But I do feel increasingly as I think about it that until we get the Associates, or

something that accomplishes this same purpose essentially, maybe a little different but a framework within which spouses can use professional skills, until that element is part of the picture, the Foreign Service life style is going to be significantly less appealing to incoming spouses. It isn't just the new ones coming in; it is just as much those who have been in for awhile as they become more experienced. They see their life moving on and are aware that if they are going to be able to function in their own capacity, they have got to do it now. So both the older and the younger are very aware of the need for something like this.

Q: It has always seemed to me that the concept of continuity of employment or the rewards of continuity of employment was one of the most appealing aspects of the program because this is the thing that has prevented, I think, people who were interested in having work experience in a coordinated way from doing this.

LOW: This program, as it stands initially, would not guarantee jobs. What we would hope would be that with time, what we would see happening is posts becoming interested in the skills that the spouse would bring to post and that as it becomes clear that there are certain channels that are developed in this country or that for the use of these or those skills, that would be an important element in people deciding to go to that post. So hopefully, once the thing got into motion -- it's quite different but just as the Community Liaison Office started as a concept and became utilized in more and more posts, I think that this, too, would make a place for itself and become increasingly useful -- as it was used.

Q: One question that I have interests me in terms of the weight that you give the recognition of volunteer service by spouses when overseas. If this project were to become reality, combined with the opportunities that the various bilateral agreements and so on have opened up, granted limited but nonetheless there, what proportion of wives -- did you ever do any tabulating on the proportion of wives who might continue to be interested in leading purely voluntary service lives, if we can put it that way?

LOW: I don't think we have any data we can put much weight on. We did ask that kind of question in the Role of the Spouse Survey. But, of course, you are doing that against a background of the meaningful job opportunities not being there. People might be able to do PIT jobs, as epitomized by that acronym, but if they had been able to do something that was up their alley, so to speak, I don't know. So you can't really tell. My guess is that it would depend partly on the post. And on the age of one's children. There are so many other significant variables that I'm not sure we can say. But my guess would be that this would be of significant interest to some people and that you wouldn't have trouble finding volunteers.

Your raising that question does remind me of one other thing that perhaps should be stressed. That is that the Foreign Service Associates is only one strand of the puzzle; that, yes, we will be having increased employment in the mission. The last time I counted, there were sixteen bilaterals. Those have serious limitations in that they only say you are

permitted to work; you have to go out and find the job; and by the time you have found it, the tour of duty may be close enough to the end that it isn't really worth the employer's time to employ you. But it is good to have that string to the bow. Another very important one, of course, is the tandem couple. But the Service can really only absorb a certain proportion of those. And it only fits some people -- or people during some part of their lives. If a couple is wanting to raise a young family, or start and raise a young family, they may well find that the Associates is the appropriate concept for that period of years. And maybe when the children are off to college, or sooner, the spouse decides to become a tandem couple and they'll take their chances on being posted close enough together. But there is no one single answer. It is going to take all of these components to make it a viable life style, in my view.

Q: Of course, the whole development of this, that you so skillfully described, is fascinating. The Foreign Service Women's Association has begun so many of the significant additions to Foreign Service life over the years that I have had knowledge of it. In this particular case certainly, the ideas came so coherently from the wives themselves that they were very persuasive. At the same time I have had to speculate on the perception that the Department had of its problems at the very time or perhaps precedent to the time when you were presenting ideas that might help them solve their problems.

LOW: They certainly were, as I indicated. [Under Secretary] Ron Spiers was very aware of this and he continues to be supportive of ways of ameliorating it that seem to be sound. The "spouse problem", if you will. There have been a number of other things in the last few years, too. One of the things we discovered working on the questionnaire on the attitudes of spouses was that it was really not possible to send material directly to the spouse. We could send it to "the spouse of" so-and-so which didn't always work and many people were annoyed, not understanding that this was the closest approximation we could reach. But we were also very aware because of the Crisis Report of the need for the Department on its side to be able to communicate directly with spouses and families -- and of spouses and families to be able to communicate directly with the Department. That's one of the things that the Iranian hostage situation pointed out. We were acutely aware of that. So one of the projects the Wye Women sponsored and again got Cox funding to cover the startup costs was a project for direct communication with spouses. That is now in place. The Department is able to carry it on. Each year three or four communications have gone out. Whether people value them or not is their business. But the thought had been that one would collect a little loose leaf folder of the data you would have if you needed it; some of the things would be more immediately relevant.

Q: To return to the Department's attitudes, at what point did FLO become actively involved in the shaping of the Foreign Service Associates concept? Or were they peripheral and expeditive?

LOW: They were the group that was asked to send out the questionnaire that accompanied our initial proposal. They were the recipient of the answers and were to

analyze and report back to the seventh floor on these. Anne Heard, who was the officer dealing with employment, was the primary person in the FLO office. Initially Marcia Curran, because she had given quite a bit of thought in the past to spouse employment within the mission, felt very strongly that that was the most important thing. This would have been April when the results were tabulated; she left in June. Sue Parsons became the director. And we continued to work closely, AAFSW with FLO, to develop these concepts. It was very much a working together.

Q: Looking back over the whole effort, how important do you think press coverage was?

LOW: It is clearly a key element. It's very hard to assess. It's a problem the Foreign Service knows well -- not just this dimension of it. Of getting the public to pay attention, to have any clear and coherent idea of what we are talking about. This was one of our real problems with the idea of spouse compensation as such -- that people didn't understand it. And, what was more, when we started talking about the FSA [Foreign Service Associates], there were many people who should have discerned the difference who confused the two. We had to write a number of Letters to the Editor, pointing out that we were not talking about spouse compensation, that the latter is a concept that needs to be given careful consideration but that we are talking here about something completely different -- a framework for the use of professional skills. We found this confusion in talking with Congress, too, to some of the people there. Once we made the point of this difference, surprisingly, we found there was a positive reaction, whereas there had been a great deal of negative reaction to the other; it still needs further work. Marlene Eagleburger was on a number of talk shows. To the extent that that made people think in terms of the problems spouses have, it was helpful; to the extent that people simply lumped it altogether and didn't distinguish, it was a great problem for us.

Q: I can understand that. Did you actually go out and solicit press interviews or initiate any contact with the press, feeling that that was a good idea to benefit your coverage?

LOW: One thing I didn't go into at any length was that, under the auspices of AAFSW, from the time that the Under Secretary's office said that this idea looks worth considering, let's look into it. AAFSW had first a study group and then a study/action group that met right here at this table every two, or at the most three, weeks. It was publicized as widely as possible. Everyone was encouraged to come if she had any interest. We held it at lunch time so that those who were working could come -- because they are a very important element in this picture. It was a lively discussion. We worked our way through every step together with everyone's ideas in the pot.

Q: Did you have an agenda at these meetings?

LOW: Usually things were happening so thick and fast that it was a matter of bringing people up to date and then laying out the situation as of that day and discussing the things we needed to be deciding at that point. Later we moved into being an action group which was partly taking the proposal to the Hill. The idea was to talk to the members of the

Foreign Relations and Foreign Affairs committees or their staff. We talked with a large number of them. Rebecca Matlock was the legislative liaison person for AAFSW. She and I made many visits together to talk to people. Other members of the group as they could, some of whom had had considerable experience either in publicity or in working with the Hill, would take their lunch hour and their list of names and go talk to people.

The same applied to publicity. We had plans for that but didn't get as far as we would have if it had gone forward into the pilot stage. Dagmar Painter was in charge of that aspect. She was all set with a game plan, with people trained in how to go out and present the ideas.

There was an occasional op ed piece -- there was one in the Los Angeles Times that made the confusion I spoke of with spouse compensation and dealt with the whole subject in the most lamentable terms. So getting a letter to the editor and getting it published took a certain amount of time. Even some of the coverage in the Washington papers made the same confusion and had to be corrected. The Federal Times had a young woman covering that beat; she gave us the most accurate coverage of anyone.

I forgot one major publicity event in the course of all this. The Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs put together a symposium at FSI on the subject of FSA at the time when the task force was shaping up the pilot program. It was a time when all the agencies were invited to come as well as interested spouses.

Incidentally, the idea as it developed was not to be a State Department, or even a foreign affairs agency, mechanism. Since when we are at post we are all part of the same community, it was felt very important that it not be a divisive factor and that all agencies who have personnel assigned abroad to our diplomatic missions would take part on a pro rata basis in terms of the positions they would make available and their share of the funding. As the program went forward to the Hill in February 1986, the diplomatic attaché program had signed on. We were hopeful that as the thing gathered momentum, by October, others would join -- or in the course of the pilot.

Q: I was at that symposium which I thought was excellent. I chose to attend the working group that dealt with the potential effect on the officer corps itself. I am interested to know what was the thinking in that context after that meeting because I thought that I detected on the part of the officer individuals who attended that meeting rather considerable reserve.

LOW: There was some reserve. And there were some people who just plain didn't like the idea. But by the same token there were a number who thought it was a good idea and a larger number who thought it made good sense to follow through and just see what could be done with it. That's why, whatever one's position on it, it was clear that a pilot program was the next stage. Because even its strongest supporters were aware that only by putting it into motion could one see how it would function best. Its supporters were hopeful that as that process got underway, many people who had reservations, as was fair enough

when they hadn't seen how it would function, that those reservations could be resolved.

Q: Another question the answer to which I hadn't been clear about: Was there any attempt in the process of the development of the FSA to compare the experience of the United States with that of any other foreign country?

LOW: Yes. We went through the exercise.

Q: And was that process useful?

LOW: No, it really wasn't because each country is in a very different set of circumstances. Although people sometimes tossed comparisons around, it isn't at all clear that they were valid. For one thing, it is quite clear that we were in the forefront of the thinking on this. This was something new and other countries were very much interested in what we were doing. We continue to receive inquiries even now. The differences, looking at it globally, are that a country may provide a stipend or a percentage of an employee's salary but it is not clear whether this is for additional costs of living if you have your wife and family with you or whether sometimes -- I believe it was the Thai ambassador's wife who indicated that her husband was paid a sum that was meant to include her actually supervising the presentation of Thai dishes at their table. But it is virtually impossible to compare these practices in any meaningful way.

Continuation of interview: June 18, 1987

Q: There are rather considerable differences between the proposals made by the group of people who worked on the Foreign Service Associates concept up to the point where legislation provided for the formulation of a pilot project and the project as returned to Congress in response to that legislation. Would you talk about the differences between the two proposals, one as ended and the other as a beginning project, the pilot project, that is? And what happened during the period after the State Department officially took over the proposal and began to put it into what I call "bureaucratic terminology and terms"?

LOW: Well, that's a very legitimate question. I guess the best way is to explain the procedure of the way things happened. Once the legislation was enacted, which directed the Secretary to design a pilot program and to report back to Congress on its shape and the plans to implement it, the Department's next step was to appoint someone to head the design and to gather together a task force to help him with the process. We, of course, were outside of that process. At the beginning it was sort of touch and go as to how much we would even know what was going on, much less how much input we would have into the final product. Perhaps indicative of this is the fact that Ambassador Hart, who was heading the project, very quickly drew up a first draft design. When we were shown it, upon request, there was not a single reference to our Foreign Service Associates concept nor any indication that it had ever been talked about. We did then ...

Q: You remember what that earliest draft did concentrate on?

LOW: We have a copy of it and you are welcome to look at it. It was talking more about employment within the Department, of making more equitable the employment possibilities. But the basic concept of a framework for career development with the possibility of using professional skills in a sequence of posts over time, there was no hint of that there at all.

In our first meeting with Hart, there were probably three of us -- our minutes would show. I should say that he was a very good listener. We laid out for him what we were trying to accomplish, what this was all about, what in fact the legislation was referring to when it talked about the Foreign Service Associates, that this wasn't just some unformed idea, that it did have a content to it, and this is what the content was. By the end of that conversation, or maybe there were two of them, and after much discussion, because he brought up a number of problems he saw and areas he wasn't certain about, the result was that in his next draft the Associates concept was indeed there. That whole way of going about things was characteristic of the entire process of designing the project -- that we would have discussions with him from time to time as things developed and he did make accessible to us the drafts and the thinking behind them so that we did have a chance to evaluate and critique and say, "But this is what we would like to see included and why." We had an ongoing dialogue with him about it. There were times when Sam Hart would need to explain our position to other parts of the establishment, although we had other channels of communication as well. We felt that Hart did have quite a good idea of our thinking but sometimes we had to reinforce his understanding. The drafts did tend to drift away -- and I don't mean that to be critical because he was as fair minded and as open minded as we could possibly have expected. If it had been in the hands of someone with a closed mind on these issues, the outcome would not have been nearly as adequate as it was. There was, of course, a fair amount of opposition within the Department and, equally importantly, there were a number of people who just weren't at all sure, given the objectives, how best to accomplish them.

One of the major decisions to be made was whether we would indeed be a service corps, meaning that everyone would come in at the same rate of pay regardless of the work done -- rank in position, that is, rather than rank in person. This would mean that each person would be treated equally whatever they were doing. The basic decision to handle it on this principle vastly simplified the whole process. Another important consideration was not to create a parallel personnel system but insofar as possible to streamline it so that it would dovetail with existing personnel practices and create only a minimum of further work or complication. The people in personnel who worked with this aspect of the design, approached it with good will and with that objective in mind. Again, I think we have much to thank them for -- that it was handled in this way.

As the pattern began to take shape, it was clear that an overriding concern in the minds of many people was morale at post and what the net effect of such a program would be. The last thing in the world that people concerned with this issue wanted to see was something

that created more problems than it solved in terms of morale. So it became apparent that it was important that the jobs be open on the same set of conditions across the board to the spouses of the employees of all agencies who were assigned to the diplomatic mission. That meant talking with the other foreign affairs agencies and with outside agencies, such as the military attaché program. One of the accomplishments of the later part of the development of the pilot was talking with these other agencies and urging them, on the part of the Department, urging them to take part in the program, too.

Q: It was the Department that conducted these conversations?

LOW: Yes, because you see it was the Secretary of State ...

Q: Yes, of course, but I wasn't quite clear from what you had said whether it was you -- meaning the AAFSW group -- who talked on behalf of -- to other agencies.

LOW: No, we never talked on behalf of anyone else. We spoke as AAFSW. At this stage of the development of the project, once the legislation was in effect, it wasn't our project any longer; it was a State Department project at the request of Congress. So we were not members of the task force.

Q: The influence that you had then depended in large measure on the intelligent good will of Sam Hart and whoever else ...

LOW: Yes, and the people in the FLO office and other people in personnel who wanted to see this given a good trial. As I've said before, apart from those who just wanted the whole idea forgotten, to anyone who was concerned with it, whether they were strongly in favor or had serious doubts, it was clear that the next step was a pilot program to test how these ideas would work out.

If I may go back to that one other point for a minute and then we will come back to this -- in the later development of the project, the Department spoke to the other agencies, trying to get their participation on the basis of offering a pro rata share of the jobs being made available and a pro rata share of the costs. So whatever agency the employee worked for, the spouse who wanted to take part in the Associates program and met the qualifications would have equal access to the job opportunities. That was very important. This "outreach", if you like, took place first within the Board of the Foreign Service where all the foreign affairs agencies are represented. There we, AAFSW, presented the proposal to them in a meeting early in this process, a meeting at which FLO was present and commented on it. There was a later stage of discussion in that board where we were not present nor were we present at the outreach to the non-foreign-affairs agencies. But as it turned out, at the time that the proposal went back to Congress, four of the five foreign affairs agencies had agreed to participate, excluding AID which said that first they would have to figure out where the funds would come from but that they were not closing the door on the possibility; it was considered likely that once the pilot was underway, they would participate. The only agency outside of foreign affairs that signed on initially was

the military attaché program. But from our point of view, that was highly significant.

There were many aspects involved in designing the pilot. There were all the personnel problems, such as rank in person or in position. There were questions of what pay scale and what benefits would be available -- all kinds of personnel questions to be worked out. Then there were other kinds of questions -- how the program would be administered at post, what the relationship between the post and the Department would be, for instance, in dealing with such questions as nepotism. "Nepotism" is one of those words that keep being thrown around and people aren't sure precisely what they mean by it; but there is clearly an unease about the possibility that someone might be reviewing the spouse of a superior officer. In what way can you keep this from being difficult or stressful, putting pressure on the person. There are ways to come to grips with this. But it was one of the sets of concerns that had to be dealt with.

To go back to the whole process of putting the pilot together, we found all along the way that we, AAFSW, had to keep bringing our ideas back into the picture, that things would tend to drift away from what we felt was our central objective, which was, again, a framework for the use of a wide spectrum of professional skills both within the mission and outside it, being seconded in a Peace-Corps-like way to a job in the host country. We kept pointing out, for instance, that there was a need for people in the mental health field, that even within the mission they were strongly needed. And there were other areas within the embassy itself where non-traditional skills could make highly desirable additions.

Up to the very end we found that the design tended to drift away from our objectives. Even in the final draft of the report, we felt that the Associates concept was in danger of being lost sight of. There were a number of places in the text where we saw the need to reinforce the Associates concept, to keep in focus what was being talked about when one used the term Foreign Service Associates. We did succeed, for the most part, in getting these changes included. We did not get into the report everything we would have liked to see. Beyond that, a number of things that were incorporated to please this or that person or group that we weren't altogether happy with. But it wasn't for us either to design the report nor to approve it. All we could hope to do was to have an influence to see that it was as adequate as possible. There were points of honest difference. To illustrate: The question of whether part time jobs should be available. We felt it would clearly be desirable to leave the option of part time employment possibilities open. The task force chairman didn't agree; we talked about it at some length; the final language is in the set of terms he chose but it wasn't iron clad. That was the best we could do. At the very last moment, the second section, part B, the enhanced employment program, suddenly appeared and was inserted intact. This wasn't considered a matter of concern to us since it dealt with personnel procedures and practices within the Department.

We considered that the overall report as it went back to Congress was a signal achievement -- that a program did get put together, that did get cleared and did get back to Congress at the appointed time. We were certain that without the legislation instructing the Secretary to do this, it would not have happened for a long, long time if ever. And that

while it did not address as clearly and incisively as we would have liked what we were trying to accomplish, we felt fortunate to have gotten as far as we did. But there was never any feeling, "Here is our program intact, all ready to go."

Q: I was very interested in two aspects of change in the final proposal. One, the one that says very forthrightly that the possibility of compensating the spouses of senior officials, having aroused the most controversy, had been set aside for further consideration. I assumed that this was an indication of, shall we say, the impossibility of coming to a conclusion on that particular point within the Department.

LOW: That, of course, is a very difficult point and we had many discussions with the Department about it. In fact it was Ambassador Hart who felt strongly that this should be included, despite the fact that we had had some indications from the Hill that it would not be welcome (and the pilot was dependent on further Congressional funding). Ironically, we were the ones who counseled, "Let's leave that aside because we don't want to jeopardize the whole program." Not that we felt any less strongly about it but we had had enough exposure both to opinion on the Hill and among the general public to know it had to be thought through further -- that in the form that thinking had developed to that point, it wasn't going to fly. It could in fact be to the detriment of the other parts of the program. Our initial proposal, as you recall, had everything lumped together. It was in the Sharper Focus of April, after the responses came back from the field, that we separated the four distinct parts of our concern of which only one was the Associates program, that being the professional one. But we kept separate the volunteers and the ways in which they could appropriately be recognized, and this one of spouses and how to compensate them for their representational role. I think we discussed that in the earlier part of the interview.

Q: Yes, we did.

LOW: But you are right. That was the way it was. At one stage, let's say the penultimate draft, it was there. But there was such a barrage of opposition to it that it clearly didn't make sense to leave it in. Both within the Department and outside, there was opposition.

Q: The second item that caught my attention was the provision within the more detailed aspects of the pilot program that whichever half of a tandem couple was not employed at any given time, should the pilot project provide for employment for which that person might become eligible, that person could then become eligible and receive employment along with anyone else who might apply for a given job. It seemed to me, on the face of it, that the experience and qualifications of a tandem couple spouse almost inevitably would be such that that person would have some kind of advantage. Would you agree?

LOW: Well, it would depend on what spectrum of job possibilities you are talking about. In terms of jobs within the mission, yes, within limits. Of jobs outside the mission, not necessarily. The idea behind this, I'm sure, would have been that no one should be excluded from the jobs. That doesn't necessarily mean that they would be the ones who would get them. That is an indication of how strong a value was placed on morale at post

and on everyone feeling that the matter was handled in an equitable way.

Q: Finally, there is the very forthright statement in the final proposal that I would like to read. (page 13, the second major paragraph). It says: "It should be recognized that should major elements of the pilot program be applied in substantial numbers worldwide, it could change the shape of the career service." That is a very strong statement. I wonder if you have any comments on the implications of that statement, particularly that part of it that says it could change the shape of the career service?

LOW: There certainly were those who viewed the Associates program as a threat. What we were trying to say all along was that this didn't need to be so. We did point out, however, that the career service is changing and that the world we will be facing, in personnel terms, a few years down the line will be very different from the one we were facing then. But I think that paragraph itself gives a good clue to where the concern was because it goes on to say: "If this were to happen, a fresh look would be needed and the views of AFSA and AFGC given appropriate consideration." I think it was intended to reassure those groups and those elements in those groups that this wasn't going to be permitted somehow to make a radical change in the ground rules. I suppose that before it is possible to assess how these things are going to work out, one does have to have a pilot program. The intention all along was to see how the innovation could be made to function most adequately. The intention of the pilot was to work out a program that would fit as smoothly as possible into the existing order of things. It was not meant to jeopardize or threaten other positions. So there should be no conflict here. We were not uncomfortable with saying this if they felt that to do so would be to reassure the very legitimate interests of others.

Q: I have been very interested in talking with you about the process by which you and all those who were associated with you in the Foreign Service Women's Association, arrived at the point where there was first of all a concept that could be presented and, secondly, something even more important, it seems to me, the cooperation, if I can put it in those terms, between the Foreign Service Women's Association and the Department in the final product. It seems to me that there is an indication, if any was needed, in this process of the extraordinary advance in the ability of the Foreign Service Women's Association, as an organization, to use skillfully and to the utmost both its own resources in terms of the ability of the individuals who worked on the project. But not only that, those forces which clearly ought to be brought to bear in the formulation of such a project, that is, of course, and most immediately, the Department, and, of course, and most immediately, the Congress. But then, also the use of the press and the way in which these three strands were woven together by the individuals who had the idea to begin with is a clear indication of the extraordinary difference between the skills among other things of the Foreign Service Women's Association at the time of the formulation of the Policy Statement on Wives in 1972 and almost precisely fifteen years later the coming to fruition at a certain point of the concept of the Foreign Service Associates program. I don't know whether you see this as clearly as I do but it seems to me as if it is one of the most striking illustrations of the difference between the attitude of each of these three important

organizations -- the Department, Congress, and the press toward wives as could possibly be adduced.

LOW: I hadn't thought of it that way. I think you've got a point. Among the differences in those fifteen years was what was going on in our country, a raising of consciousness and a recognition that these were legitimate concerns and differences -- or it couldn't have happened. Another element in the picture that is of crucial importance, I think, is that the 1972 Statement on Wives did produce a shock through the whole system. One sees then the development of the Forum report of 1977 which certainly must have been activated in part by that. The 1977 Forum report is perhaps the first indication of the real change in attitudes in a significant way. Our Foreign Service Associates program and some of the other projects we developed in the AAFSW Forum are outgrowths of what happened at that point in time. So I do think they are connected. And I think that the Associates in a sense happened because the time was ripe -- that enough people were sufficiently concerned about the Foreign Service and about the relationship of spouses to it. That certainly is why Under Secretary Spiers was interested in pursuing this idea to see whether it would be helpful with one part of the problem. The problem had become so acute.

In terms of the "spouse problem" itself, I think it was becoming clear that it was not just the incoming spouses who had been conditioned by our society to expect to be their own "beings" despite being married to the Foreign Service. The fact was that so many more senior wives were discovering that it mattered to them, too. Partly, of course, they were conditioned by the currents stirring in this society when they returned to it and sampled it and found themselves saying: "But this is my lifetime and if I don't do these things now or accomplish things that matter to me now, I never will!" So all segments of the spouse population were pushing in this direction.

But you have to recognize also that there were some who didn't share these views and they certainly are entitled to their opinions and should not be left aside. Each person needs to evaluate for herself -- himself -- mostly herself -- how they want to handle this major part of their lives. But I think increasingly spouses are wanting to have an opportunity to use their own capacities. And in view of the fact that this could be much in the interest, not just of the Foreign Service, but of the American body politic and taxpayer, ways should be found to bring this about. That, I think, is why the Associates program emerged when it did and why I am hopeful about its future.

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse's name: Stephen Low

Date entered Service: January 1956

Left Service: April 1987

Posts:

1957-59 Kampala, Uganda
1960-63 Dakar, Senegal
1968-71 Brasilia, Brazil
1976-79 Lusaka, Zambia
1979-81 Lagos, Nigeria

Status: Spouse of FSO (ambassador)

Date and place of birth: Tulsa, Oklahoma; 1926

Maiden Name: Carpenter

Parents: J. Rodman Carpenter

Schools:

Denison University, BA 1948; Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, MA 1949; Oxford University, BA, MA, 1951; Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, completion of comprehensive exams for PhD, 1952

Date and place of marriage: Findley, Ohio; 1954

Children: Three

Positions held in Washington and at post:

At Post: Brazil - President School Board; organized Brazilian-American discussion group. Zambia - President American Women's Club, organized seminar on Zambian life for American women. Worked on contract on Zambian economic affairs; Nigeria - Honorary president American Women's Club, organized Nigerian/Third World Country study group in Nigerian literature.

Washington, DC: AAFSW activities - 1982-84, Forum Chairman, worked on developing Foreign Born Spouse group and teenage group AWAL; also worked with divorced FS spouses to prepare legislation; chaired group which researched and wrote FS Families in Situations of International Crisis to present to Secretary of State; worked with education group to survey and report on Educational Realities for FS families; worked on survey of attitude toward FS of all FS spouses; 1984-86, Developed Foreign Service Associate proposal and led group which achieved legislation to require design of pilot project to institute direct communication with spouses.

Honors: Phi Beta Kappa, BA with honors; Fulbright scholarship to Oxford and Soroptimist

End of interview