

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

DALE AND MARILYN POVENMIRE

Interviewed by: Morris Weisz
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Marilyn Joan Ross married Dale Povenmire, a State Department Foreign Service Officer, in 1954 and accompanied him as dependent spouse on his assignments in Washington D.C. and abroad. In 1972 she became a Foreign Service Officer, and the two of them served as Tandem Officers until Dale's retirement in 1990, after which Dale accompanied Marilyn as dependent spouse on her assignment at the US Embassy in London, England

Background

Dale Povenmire

Born in Ohio

Baldwin-Wallace College; Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy

US Navy

Entered the Foreign Service in 1957

Marilyn Povenmire: Raised in Massachusetts

Tufts University; George Washington University; National Defense University

Profession: Foreign Service Officer; Teacher; Librarian; Researcher/Writer

Entered the Foreign Service as Foreign Service Officer in 1971

General Comments on Dependent Spouse, Tandem Assignments and other

Benefits to Department of State

Partnership

Children

Education

Separations

Discovering roots

Attitude problems

Views on dependent spouse working in Embassy

Attainment of goals

Children's careers

Lack of intellectual stimulation

Younger wives' dissatisfaction

Senior wives' unhappiness with change

Views on Tandem Assignments

Prevalence of Tandem Assignments

Lack of adequate medical facilities abroad
Gender discrimination in assignments

POSTS OF ASSIGNMENT

Dale assignment; Marilyn as dependent spouse

Washington, DC June 1957 - Sept. 1957

Mexico City, Mexico Sept. 1957- Dec. 1958

Dale: Spanish language training
Marilyn: Spanish language lessons

Santiago, Chile Dec. 1957- Jan. 1960

Dale
Economic Officer
Marilyn
Social protocol for wives
American Women's Club of Santiago, committee chairman
Representation entertaining
Assistance from senior wives

Washington, DC Feb. 1960 – June 1961

Dale: Intelligence and Research
Marilyn: Life in suburbs
Economics Course, Gorge Washington University

Zanzibar June 1961 – Oct. 1963

Dale
General officer
Marilyn:
Zanzibar Women's Association
British women
Children's schooling

Asuncion, Paraguay Jan 1964 – July 1966

Dale
Political Officer
Marilyn:
Teaching
President, American Women's Group
Children's schooling

Washington, DC July 1966 – Sept. 1969

Dale

<p>International Relations Officer Representative to Joint Chiefs of Staff, Pentagon Marilyn Contract, Bureau of Intelligence and Research Librarian and teacher</p>	
<p>Oporto, Portugal Dale Principal Officer Marilyn Children's schooling</p> <p>Marilyn and Dale on "tandem" assignments</p>	<p>Sept. 1969- Sept. 1972</p>
<p>Caracas, Venezuela Marilyn Children's schooling Dale Political Officer and Labor Attaché</p>	<p>Oct. 1972 - Feb. 1974</p>
<p>Nicosia, Cyprus –(Temporary Duty Assignment) Marilyn Chancery evacuated Environment Security Consular work Trips to Turkish side Delivering Social Security checks Operations Separation</p>	<p>1975</p>
<p>Lisbon, Portugal Children's schooling Awareness of changes in spouse role</p>	<p>Oct. 1974 – Feb. 1978</p>
<p>Sao Paulo, Brazil Children's schooling</p>	<p>March 1978 – July 1981</p>
<p>Rome, Italy</p>	<p>Sept. 1983 – July 1987</p>
<p>Washington, DC Marilyn: National Defense University Bureau of Consular Affairs; Director of Policy and Coordination</p>	<p>Aug. 1987 – Apr. 1990</p>

Marilyn assignment; Dale as dependent spouse

London, England	1990-1993
Housing	
Recreation	
Representation responsibilities	
US-British agreement re working Embassy spouses	

Retirement	1993
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INTERVIEW

Q: After you retired in Rome, Dale, you and Marilyn returned to Washington for her next assignment. Where was that, and what did you do?

DALE POVENMIRE: She was assigned to the National Defense University for the '87-'88 school year and subsequently to the bureau of consular affairs as director of the policy and coordination staff until the summer of 1990. During the time we were in Washington, I basically kept the house running, and then Marilyn went to London in September 1990. We returned from London in September of '93. We're now starting our joint retirement.

Q: In London how did you occupy your time; any different from Rome?

DALE POVENMIRE: Yes. In London we did not have household help, as we did in Rome two days a week, and in London we lived in embassy housing for the first time. It was an apartment in a building with other embassy families, in Hampstead. We found Hampstead a delightful area, the Georgetown of London. It was a delightful post for me as a spouse because of the wonderful opportunities for me in and around the city of London. There was another retired officer there and one day a week we would get out and visit a museum, a play or whatever. But this is just fortunate circumstance. I remember that when we were a tandem couple, both working and engaged 100 percent in our jobs, our children all in school, I felt that the Foreign Service certainly got full value from having an employed couple.

Q: What about the children, how did they feel about your tandem responsibilities - yours Dale? Did they think it was a challenge to your status as the head of the household?

DALE POVENMIRE: Well, I don't think I ever felt that I dominated the household; I always thought that we had a partnership. When I was the officer, before Marilyn joined the Service, I felt that she was a full time Foreign Service spouse. In effect it didn't seem to change very much when she started to work as a Foreign Service officer. Especially since, when she started, our youngest was already in school. This was in 1972.

Q: Any other comments about spousal advantages or, especially, disadvantages?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Think about other male spouses, those who are not retired.

DALE POVENMIRE: All right. Well, in my case I think the advantages outweighed the disadvantages, and from the Service's point of view the advantages outweighed the disadvantages, so in our particular cases it was a good deal. In the case where the wife was working and the husband was without a fixed position or embassy contact of any kind, the situation could have been more difficult. I'm not the person to speak on that.

Q: Were you ever tempted to get a job at the embassy or elsewhere? If not, was it because the income was good enough to support you, or you just had so many other things to do? What about contracts with the U.S. government?

DALE POVENMIRE: No, I wasn't tempted. I suppose it was because of the hassle one would have to go through, and there wasn't an opening of sufficient interest to make a hassle worthwhile. As to contracts, nobody ever offered me one. I didn't particularly seek that; I had other interests.

Q: I raise this because it's a different situation with respect to some people. But your situation sounds like a happy one.

DALE POVENMIRE: I am a happy camper. I think it helped that I felt I had had a full and rewarding career and did not have goals that I had not reached.

Q: Do you have any recommendations for other spouses about what they should try to do or avoid doing?

DALE POVENMIRE: That depends on each individual and what they find worthwhile and rewarding. For myself it has been a very happy period for retirement.

Q: You had no representational responsibilities in London?

DALE POVENMIRE: Marilyn had very limited representational responsibilities. She had an important job, but it was not representational.

Q: Fine. I have nothing else to add. Thank you very much. If you think of something else, we could record it later on the tape. Now I'll ask you to turn over the microphone to Marilyn.

Q: This is Morris Weisz continuing an interview with the Povenmires. Now we'll turn to Marilyn Povenmire, as a spouse until she entered the Foreign Service, and beyond that for any comments she would like to make on tandem responsibilities, her entrance into the Foreign Service, and what issues she thinks would be relevant for the work of the

spousal interview program. Marilyn, do you want to begin by telling about your entrance into the Foreign Service life when Dale entered the Foreign Service?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Well, we were married on the 4th of April 1954 and on our honeymoon, three days later in Washington, Dale took the Foreign Service oral exam, so I feel as though our marriage and this career pretty much began in the same week. But he went into the Navy for three years, so we didn't actually become part of the Foreign Service family until June 1957. We had by then already been married for three years; we had two little children. We went, after the A-100 course, to Mexico City, just for a three-month stopover there while Dale had Spanish language training.

DALE POVENMIRE: I think it's only fair to mention that at the time that I took the Foreign Service oral examination in 1954, Marilyn had already passed the written portion of the Foreign Service exam herself. So, she had some idea of coming into the Foreign Service even at the time we were married.

Q: So that, as distinguished from other cases where some women gave up their careers, Marilyn had an interest in the Foreign Service to begin with.

DALE POVENMIRE: But was not allowed to take the oral examination.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: I wrote and asked them if I could take the oral, told them in the meantime I'd been married but I was interested in a tandem-like arrangement, and they said "forget it".

Q: At least forget it for many years! But let's go back a minute to two things: one, your own background - educational, family, etc., before you got married. You come from...

MARILYN POVENMIRE: I come from Massachusetts, born and raised there, eldest of a family of four, went to public schools there. One big trauma in my life was the death of my father when I was twelve; besides losing him, that made life difficult financially for the family. But the idea of education was always a motivating force for the family. In order to go to college I had to try to get a scholarship, which I did, and I went to Tufts University with a merit scholarship and majored in economics. I graduated with a B.A. degree summa cum laude. I made Phi Beta Kappa in my junior year, which is some distinction, and married Dale in my senior year.

Q: So you gave up possibilities for a career at that point.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: I had taken the Foreign Service written exam at the beginning of my senior year, and after we were married, although I became a mother very quickly, about eleven months after we were married, I didn't really give up my ambition for doing something with my education and my ability.

Q: Let's go into your training for the Foreign Service. Did you take that course...

MARILYN POVENMIRE: You know, it's a long time ago, 36 and a half years ago, but I think we did have a few course sessions. Mostly they were about protocol kinds of things and social activities, representation, how to put on a dinner party.

Q: It must have been a bit of a shock and a come down for a person of your background to sort of accept a secondary position.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Well, these were the 1950s; it was quite a different world then. After we married I looked for things to do until the children took up full time. For a while I did substitute teaching and I worked on an economic research project for the U.S. government - a contract on the fiscal policy of Ireland. But then we went to Honolulu for three years while Dale was in the navy and I had two children there, so I didn't follow any professional activities then.

Q: Did you try to get work at all? I guess the children occupied your time is what it amounted to. Did you do much social entertaining and things like that in the early period?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: In the Foreign Service? Well at our first post, which was Santiago, Chile, basically I learned how to be a Foreign Service wife. It was a good orientation post for me, but it was the old Foreign Service. As soon as I arrived I was expected to call on ... I think it was 36 women whose husbands were more senior than mine ... bringing my calling cards.

Q: Bent at the corner in a certain way!

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Yes. I joined the women's group there. I guess it was the American Women's Club of Santiago. Eventually, after I was there for about a year, they asked me to be one of the minor officers of the club. I became chairman of the welcome committee, in charge of helping other newcomers find their way. It wasn't only government wives. There were American business wives and so forth.

Q: Did you have language facility by then?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Yes. I had studied a little bit of Spanish in college, and I went an hour a day to embassy classes to work on my Spanish in Mexico City, while Dale was assigned to language training. I have a facility for languages, so I eventually did very well in three foreign languages.

Q: To what degree, if any, did you have entertainment responsibilities?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: We didn't have a lot at Dale's first post in Santiago. But I did some entertaining and I learned how it was supposed to be done. Also, I certainly contributed to whatever the ambassador's wife or the DCM's wife was doing. I may have

even contributed to the extent of cooking something and bringing it to their representational functions. We were expected to be there to work during such functions.

Q: But Dale was junior to so many officers, what problems occurred as a result of the - I would almost say demeaning - type of relationship with women considered "senior" only because their husbands were senior to yours?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Well, there certainly was a lot of room for abuse there. But I think the atmosphere in Santiago was a pretty healthy one. It was more the situation of the elder women mostly being oriented to helping the younger ones. The DCM's wife noticed that our place wasn't very well furnished because we couldn't afford to bring a lot of furniture, so she sent over a couple extra pieces that she couldn't use. That sort of thing.

DALE POVENMIRE: I recall it as very much a team effort. Some of our most long-lasting Foreign Service friends date from Santiago. People we had over last night were people we met in Santiago.

Q: Well, this will be an interesting contribution to the spousal project, because there are so many other types of relationships that have to be balanced with this type of one. Any other comments on Santiago before we proceed to the next? No?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: No. Next we were sent back to Washington on assignment. We were there for about 18 months. Dale was in INR [Intelligence and Research]. I lived out in the suburbs with, by this time, three little children, and I have to say that I wasn't very happy. I really was confined and I tried to think of something to do beyond the house, so I took one course at George Washington University in economics. It gave something else to think about. I remember that we had a party at our house and Dale invited his colleagues from work, including a woman officer. I envied her a great deal. She was a Foreign Service Officer and I was only a homebody.

Q: Well, with the responsibilities with the kids, you probably couldn't have done anything else then.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Yes, and we certainly didn't have the income to pay for much help. That's why Dale volunteered to go to one of the posts opening up in Africa. And so we went to Zanzibar. There wasn't really any scope for me to work in Zanzibar either, but I did again become active in a women's group that was there. The Zanzibar Women's Association. It was pretty much run by the British women, because Zanzibar was a British protectorate. But we few American women became involved, and it was worthwhile because it was a multiracial and multiethnic group; some of the women were even in purdah. I think our activities with them helped to open slightly a window on the world for them.

Q: Was there some demarcation line between the British and American women in terms of the British attitude towards colonials there? Coming from the north, you presumably

had a more liberal attitude towards Africans.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Well, we knew their attitude was different from ours, but I don't think it really caused any friction. We were diplomatic about it. They had a different attitude towards lots of things. They were very keen on games, for example. I remember one woman with a scythe, cutting long grass, outside of her housing compound along the road. It was raining. She explained to our consul's wife that, "Mixed hockey canceled today; must do something!" (At the Purdah Club we played a relay race game called "thread the needle", theoretically an activity that all could enjoy.) Though we had different attitudes in a lot of ways, we got along fine.

Q: Any problems related to, this applies to both of you I suppose, children's travel back and forth. Were you disposed to send the children home for schooling or was it necessary in some instances?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: We did later, not in Zanzibar, although the British certainly did.

Q: They send them home at the age of four, it seems.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Yes, five, six, and that was the age of our eldest child when we were there.

Q: Did yours go to the local school?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: They went to the local school. Well, there was, not an international school, there was a sort of nursery/kindergarten school. Because the British did send them off when they got to first grade level, so our children went to that school. For about a year or half a year our eldest daughter was sort of a post-grad in kindergarten. Her teacher tried to give her some extra things to do. Then we sent her to a local convent school under the direction of German nuns, but the teachers were all Goan. Our daughter was the only native English speaker in the school. She came home with lessons, for example, reciting things like, "Bedouin Arabs herd sheep and kettles". Kettle being the way the teacher pronounced cattle. By the way, I remember there was a public debate in Zanzibar on the resolution that: the participation of women in the public life of a country was necessary for the country's development. The decision was no. I attended the debate; it was pretty hard to take.

Q: As far as schooling was concerned, later on the kids went to local schools at post or...

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Well, then we went on to Asuncion and further posts while the children were, let's say, under the age of 15, and they went to either an American school or to a British school, in the case of Oporto. Those were the younger two children there, because, by the time we got to Oporto, our eldest two were teenagers. The Oporto British School was basically an elementary school. We sent the older children to boarding

school in Switzerland.

Q: Can you speak to their attitude towards being sent away from home instead of to - what is normally - to a local high school?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Eventually all four of them went away to school by the time they were 16, but the two younger ones went to boarding schools in the States when we were in Caracas, Lisbon, or São Paulo respectively.

Q: What are the financial repercussions of sending kids off to school? What was the burden, was it mostly the government's or yours?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Mostly government, the education allowance.

Q: Did this add to your financial burdens?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Not very much, but some. The big burdens came when they got to college. But in terms of their attitudes towards going away to secondary school, particularly the two eldest, perhaps we didn't consult them enough and they didn't feel that they were able to present their feelings in the matter. The younger two, I think, had made up their minds that this was what they wanted to do. Even so, and perhaps not unusually, they had some unhappy times at boarding school. But the elder two resented it, we found out eventually. By the time they were in their twenties they went through a time when they sort of blamed us for sending them away.

Q: So interesting and really terrible. On balance, however, with respect to your children, how do you feel they turned out in terms of advantages and disadvantages over other kids? You know what a wide range of experience Foreign Service families have. Some think for the kids it was a totally positive experience; others point to drugs and other problems that they've had, and blame it on the Foreign Service - in some cases justifiably from my point of view. But what is the total assessment you have of the impact on kids of being brought up as Foreign Service children?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Thank goodness we didn't have trouble with drugs. I think our children are more sophisticated than they would have been if they had been raised in the U.S. They came from a different background than their fellow students at college; sometimes they felt like foreign students. But they have done well in school. They all have Bachelor degrees, and there are two Masters and a PhD among the four of them.

Q: Careers? Affected adversely or ...

MARILYN POVENMIRE: The eldest works for the State Department, in public affairs, and enjoys it very much. She is not Foreign Service; she's Civil Service. She enjoys being in that atmosphere and knowing what's happening all around the world. Our son went into something entirely different. He works as an environmental consultant and landscape

architect. He has a hearing loss, and I think that made languages difficult for him. So, while he is happy to be in the States, he talks every once in a while about taking a project overseas. Our middle daughter has her PhD. She is a clinical psychologist in California. Our youngest daughter is a travel agent. She works in Washington. You know, when people ask for a routing to Ouagadougou, it doesn't bother her. She just thinks what an exciting trip that might be.

Q: On balance, it sounds like being brought up abroad was of some value to them.

DALE POVENMIRE: Morris, I think that, at the time, we thought that it was predominantly a positive experience. Looking back on it with the kids, we didn't realize how difficult it was for them. We moved from post to post in a structured situation. We had a job to go to, certain things we had to do. They had to change friends, languages, schools, the whole life-style and environment. I think there were hidden problems, which we didn't really appreciate, for the kids at the time. We focused on the positive and, I guess, we ignored the negative. (Growing up in the States, we had established roots from childhood, but our children only began to put down roots as adults.) So I think there has been some fallout, but happily our kids seem to have surmounted the problems.

Q: In your future posts, before your entry into the Foreign Service, Marilyn, what different situations from what you have already told me did you experience?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: After Zanzibar we went to Asuncion and it was still old Foreign Service. (I was still being rated on Dale's efficiency report.) That was '64 to '66. But there was opportunity, with the children getting older, an opportunity to teach school. There was an American school there. So I took that opportunity; I even taught my own daughter 6th grade. Earlier on, before I took the teaching job, I was asked to stand for election as president of the American women's club, which was called Las Amigas Americanas del Paraguay. For a year I was president of that group. I found that a very busy year. I enjoyed leading the women's group and we accomplished a lot of good things. Charity work, social events, helping people's adjustment to living in Paraguay. We also wrote a new edition of a book on Paraguay. That was an interesting thing to do; I was an editor of that book.

Next we went to Washington and, partly because of my academic record and facility in Spanish, and partly because they were intrigued that I had been editor of this book, I was hired on contract to work in INR in the State Department. I worked there for the last 18 months of our three-year Washington tour. (Earlier in that tour I did part-time librarian and teaching jobs.) I won a cash award for my work in INR. That led me to believe that I could compete with Foreign Service officers and do a good job. Then we went on to Oporto. We were there when the policy changed on "tandem" spouses.

Q: Now, before the policy change, to what degree did you have, for me very understandable, resentment of this "second class citizenship" that you had? Or did you just accept it?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: I certainly accepted it in Chile, because I had a lot to learn. Zanzibar was a whole other world, exotic, but I did get restless and felt I wasn't using my brain at all. In Asuncion, I began doing some paid work as a teacher, at least, and I got some satisfaction from leading the women's club. There were 100 members, so it was a big group. When we got back to Washington, I certainly wanted to do something, even though at that time the youngest was three and a half or four. My sister agreed to take her in the afternoons and I had her in a nursery school in the mornings - that worked out okay. No, I didn't feel resentment. I just knew that someday I was going to have a professional career myself.

Q: What about the spirit that was beginning to object to (the spouse's situation)? Did you participate in any way with efforts being made to gain professional recognition as a Foreign Service employee rather than just as a spouse?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: You know, I first became aware of the new spirit in Lisbon. Now we are talking about 1975 to 1978 when I was already a Foreign Service officer. I was invited to speak to the embassy wives' group on my experiences as a spouse and then as a junior officer; how I had made that transition. So I did go and talk to them. They had a discussion afterwards about the new role of wives versus the old role. I was very thankful that by this time I had my career started. The younger wives were resentful of a second-class status. They were pleased that they were no longer, like I had been, rated on how well they helped their husbands. Also, they were pleased that they could have a private life and weren't expected to bake cookies for the ambassador's wife's teas, or even appear at representational functions if they didn't want to. The older wives, the wives who had been around longer even than I had, were not very happy, because they had built a role for themselves which was no longer particularly appreciated.

Q: And there was probably some resentment that they didn't receive the sort of assistance which they had offered or been forced to give.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Right. I think that they could see or maybe had already experienced the fact that they were not going to get a lot of support from the other wives.

Q: Well then, how did you enter the Foreign Service? You had taken the written exam before.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: When they came out with this announcement in '71, I wrote them and said I had already passed the written exam in 1953. I said, "How about me? Can I take the oral now?", because I had written years before and they said I couldn't. They wrote back and said, "You have to take the written exam again." They added, "The principal officer (in Oporto) may not proctor the exam!" So I boned up a little bit and I took the exam again in November or December of 1971. I passed it with ten points higher than I did the first time. You see, I had learned something. I flew back to the States in March 1972, took and passed the oral, and I came into the Foreign Service in November

of '72.

Q: Did they give you any advanced status in terms of your experience and your academic attainments?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: They classified me as a grade 7, using the same criteria as for all junior officers. They did accord me in-grade steps, grade 7 step 5, based on education and work experience (but not on Foreign Service spouse activities).

DALE POVENMIRE: I think Marilyn had more Foreign Service experience at that point than any member of her oral panel, when she took the oral.

Q: That's interesting.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: They would say, "What would you do if such and such happened". Then I said, "Well, I remember when something like that happened, at such and such a place, and this is how we coped with it. That solution either was good or it was bad."

Q: Well anyhow, you passed. You entered at a relatively low grade for a person your age.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: I didn't have an advanced degree, you see, but I did have some work experience that they counted. I was a 7 - step 5, and the highest step for a junior officer was 7 - step 7. Within ten days after I entered, I took a Portuguese exam; by this time I'd learned Portuguese, without any help from FSI courses. So I passed the Portuguese exam and earned a 2-step increase.

Q: That means that you passed the language exam at the 3 level or above,

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Yes.

Q: That's good.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: I finished the A-100 (introductory officers') course, and then we had a 2-year assignment, pretty much together, in Caracas.

Q: But you were not in the same section.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Dale was in the political section as labor attaché and I was in the consular section. He was called out before our tour was finished. He was curtailed to go back to Lisbon. In a hurry. Between the time they called you, Dale, and you got there to Lisbon, it was no more than four or five weeks. So I stayed on in Caracas with our youngest child. The others were all away at school. I finished in Caracas in December (1974) and with my daughter went to Lisbon. The other children came to Lisbon. We had Christmas together.

There wasn't an opening for me yet in Lisbon, so I had asked for a TDY assignment. I didn't want to take leave without pay just two years into my career. It wasn't so much the money, but I didn't want a gap in my record. After a lot of fussing about it, from male chauvinist types unfortunately, they did come up with a short-term assignment for me. That was in Nicosia.

Q: That was far away, wasn't it?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: It was far away, and it was a very dicey place. The day I arrived the embassy was on fire because of demonstrations. I had to come into Cyprus by ship because the airport was closed. It was after the Turkish invasion.

Q: When would that have been, mid '70s?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: January 1975. The ambassador had been killed a couple of months before.

Q: Yes, I remember.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: I had an interesting TDY there.

Q: Yes. We visited friends there later, and what shocked us was the amount of protection we were getting at the embassy because of the events that you referred to.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: The embassy was greased so people couldn't climb it! I've never seen such a stronghold as that embassy. During that fire people actually got into the embassy, rioters. There was tear gas all over the place, so all embassy personnel were evacuated to the hotel where I was staying. So I met them right away.

Q: Did you get over to the Turkish side at all?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: I went to the Turkish side a lot. I was the one more than anyone who went to the Turkish side. I was doing consular work, and was concerned with missing Americans and with properties belonging to Americans, property that had been confiscated. But my entree, and the reason they gave me safe conduct passes to go across, was that I brought the Social Security checks. I picked up bankers on the Turkish side, and a driver, and we went all around the villages of northern Cyprus delivering checks and immediately cashing them at the little village coffee shops.

Q: Did you find the safety situation, as I did, so much easier on the Turkish side than on the Nicosia side? You still had to have protection?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: I had a driver who used to work for the embassy, so he was friendly. But I had a Turkish "minder" who wanted to set limits on what I could do, and

he wasn't terribly friendly. The Turkish army people at the roadblocks would look at my safe conduct pass upside down sometimes, because they couldn't read it. It was a little ticklish sometimes. I took some GAO [General Accounting Office] people with me once. They came out from Washington and wanted to see, I'm not sure what, but I was able to get them passes too so they could come with me on one of these trips. It got late as we tried to take in that last village, dark and after curfew. I was the only woman. One of the men told me that they all felt so much safer that I was along. Not to go into "war stories" - consuls have hundreds of them - what I really meant to say about being in Cyprus was that Dale and I were separated for basically about six months.

Q: That was quite a worry for you, Dale. Did you write to Dale giving him all these terrible details about your difficulties?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Yes.

Q: You did?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: In a way we corresponded through the BBC, found out what was happening in each other's bailiwick. Tanks were outside the embassy in Lisbon, due to rioters there, and they were firing mortars over the Green Line in Nicosia, so that was our most exciting spring.

Q: Did you get to visit Nicosia at that time?

DALE POVENMIRE: No. We had our hands full in Lisbon! There had been an aircraft carrier and a task force standing off Nicosia with the possibility of evacuating the Americans there; that same group came to Lisbon subsequently. I was interested to talk with some of those people about the fact that they were considering evacuation of Cyprus.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: That six months was our longest separation on this tandem routine.

Q: Other than that, the tandem experience was satisfactory? You both got assignments where the other was?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: The timing wasn't always perfect, but it worked out just fine. We didn't complain. We felt that was the price one had to pay for their accommodating working couples.

DALE POVENMIRE: We never arrived at or departed the post at the same time.

Q: Really. What about financially? The tandem arrangement was pretty good?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: It was good. Yes. We had two salaries, and with four children now in college or approaching college, it was a wonderful relief. We were able to send

them to the schools of their choice. That's where the money went.

Q: Yes. Different from my day. Well, thanks. Anything else? Or if you think of anything later on, we'll be happy to have it added.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Well, obviously, I'm all in favor of tandems. At one point I was an assignments officer in personnel, and had to make assignments to ARA [Latin American] posts. I think it was Guatemala where the embassy wasn't all that large, but sixteen people working at the embassy were members of tandems. So it isn't only the big European posts that accommodate tandems. Sometimes the tandems will accommodate to a fairly rough situation if they can both get a job there.

Q: Except in Vietnam. I don't imagine that we had people there in tandem, did we?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: We didn't have tandems back then. Maybe we did.

Q: We did in '71. Well, fine. Thanks again.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: One more thing ... about the situation of spouses in the career today. It's changed completely, and in London I could see the situation where there was a bilateral agreement under which spouses could work, a reciprocal agreement with the British government. So spouses who wanted to work could work there on the local economy or in the embassy. I think that's a healthy thing. What's not terribly healthy is the situation, which happens often, where one spouse, probably the wife, will remain in the States to pursue her career. The family will be separated and the post also suffers from the fact that you don't have family units.

Q: Security. There's not that family security.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Yes. That's not very healthy, and anything that can be done to accommodate family units at post I would certainly applaud.

Notes and Afterthoughts:

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Another issue which could usefully be explored in spousal interviews is that of the impact of substandard medical care and unhealthy environments abroad upon Foreign Service people and their families.

Regarding representational responsibilities, we discussed above our experiences at some early posts. Our tour in Oporto, however, the last tour before we became a tandem couple, was the most demanding in terms of representation. As Dale was principal officer, we hosted frequent receptions, dinners and luncheons. We received many official visitors, often as house guests. We kept very busy attending official functions in our district, which covered the northern half of Portugal. Our children sometimes felt they lived in a

fish bowl, sometimes they felt neglected. This can show up as a real problem in some families. It was a full time job for me in Oporto to oversee a fairly large residence and staff, to plan and manage the continual stream of social functions at home and be available for outside activities. I admire those Foreign Service spouses, mostly wives, who assume this demanding responsibility at post after post and do it so well, but without monetary compensation.

Conversation with Jewell Fenzi:
June 28, 1995

Q (Fenzi): Tell me about your computer purchase.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: I recently purchased a Mac computer...

Q (Fenzi): What kind.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: A power Mac.

Q (Fenzi): Good.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: The funds came from a special source. It was a Treasury check sent to me via the State Department. It was my share of a settlement of a class action suit brought by women Foreign Service officers against the Department for gender discrimination in some assignments, recruitment, promotion, awards, whatever.

Q (Fenzi): Is that the Alison Palmer suit?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Yes, it's been pending since 1975.

Q (Fenzi): How did winning that suit after almost twenty years affect the careers of any of you involved?

MARILYN POVENMIRE: Those who started out in the class that took action, and their leaders, I suspect, benefitted very little. Those who are just arriving in the mid ranks now, and those who follow them, will be the real beneficiaries.

Q (Fenzi): However, you got your computer.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: I passed the exam in 1953, joined the Service as an officer in 1972, and could have had 18 additional years of service, promotions and pension benefits. So a computer is a minimal compensation. I will never know what I could have done.

Q (Fenzi): How do you feel it is for women today.

MARILYN POVENMIRE: It's better, but there is still a way to go.

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Dale M. Povenmire

Spouse's Position: Political officer; Principal officer, Oporto, Portugal; Acting PO, São Paulo, Brazil

Spouse Entered Service:	June 1957	Left Service: June 1986
You Entered Service:	June 1957 as spouse May 1971 as officer	Left Service: January 1994

Status: Spouse of retiree, tandem spouse

Posts:

Dale Povenmire

6/57-9/57	Washington, DC [FSI (A-100)]
9/57-12/57	Mexico City for Spanish
12/57-1/60	Santiago, Chile
2/60-6/61	Washington, DC
6/61-10/63	Zanzibar, Zanzibar Island
1/64-7/66	Asuncion, Paraguay
7/66-9/69	Washington, DC
9/69-9/72	Oporto, Portugal
10/72-10/74	Caracas, Venezuela
10/74-2/78	Lisbon, Portugal
3/78-7/81	São Paulo, Brazil
9/83-7/87	Rome, Italy
8/87-4/90	Washington, DC

Marilyn Povenmire

2/68-8/69	Washington, DC; Temporary appointment
11/72	Foreign Service Officer
2/73-12/74	Caracas
1-4/75	TDY Nicosia, Cyprus
10/74-2/78	Lisbon, Portugal
3/78-7/81	São Paulo, Brazil
9/83-7/87	Rome, Italy
8/87-4/90	Washington, DC
1990-1993	London, England

Place/Date of birth: Lowell, Massachusetts; November 5, 1932

Maiden Name: Marilyn Joan Ross

Parents (Name, Profession):

Hugh A. Ross, textile chemist

Charlotte Harvey Ross, clerk

Schools (Prep, University): Tufts University, BA in economics; graduate courses, GWU; Industrial College of the Armed Forces, National Defense University (NDU)

Profession: Foreign Service Officer (Consul)

Date/Place of Marriage: Reading, Massachusetts; April 4, 1954

Children:

Susan

Ross

Carol

Elizabeth

Positions held (Please specify Volunteer or Paid):

A. At Post: Volunteer - Chairman, Welcome Committee, American Women's Club, Santiago; Women's Association, Zanzibar; President, American Women's Club, Asuncion; Editor, Land of Love and Legend, Asuncion. Professional - Teacher, American School, Asuncion; FSO (Consular Officer) Caracas, Nicosia, Lisbon; São Paulo, Rome, London

B. In Washington, DC: Paid - teacher, librarian, researcher/writer; FSO from 11/72, e.g., Assignments Officer, Personnel, 87-88; senior studies, NDU; 88-90 Chief, Policy and Coordination Staff, CA

Honors (Scholastic, FS): Summa cum laude (Tufts); Phi Beta Kappa; cash award, INR 1969

End of interview