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

AMBASSADOR PETER CHAVEAS & LUCILLE CHAVEAS

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 27th of October and we are returning to our conversation with the Chaveas family. Peter, you want to make this about life in the Foreign Service from the spouses' point of view.

CHAVEAS, P: Right.

Q: You were talking about a recent conversation you and Lucille had?

CHAVEAS, P: Well, not real recently but back in June of 2004, my retirement was imminent. I retired at the end of that month, and we celebrated our 34th wedding anniversary on June 6th. And I don't remember exactly what we did that evening, but I am quite sure we were having a nice dinner together. During dinner, we reminisced about the fact that we had spent all but eighteen days of our married life in the Foreign Service. And then, I asked her, "Would you do it all over again?". I thought I was asking about marrying me. She replied by saying, "Well, of course, I would marry you again, but not if it included the Foreign Service".

CHAVEAS, L: Too late.

CHAVEAS, P: We had abundant experience by that time, and I think I can speak for Lucille in saying that she enjoyed the life, she enjoyed the experience along with me of being overseas and seeing different societies and being involved in them, but she did not enjoy the Foreign Service as an institution. We both understand that a lot of things changed while we were in for those thirty-four years and some more things have changed since. But I think still, fundamentally, what we have is a lot of Foreign Service spouses who contribute immensely to the success of the work we do, and they do not begin to be adequately appreciated and recognized, and recognition most particularly should mean compensation. Real compensation.

Just to brag on Lucille a little. When we arrived at our first post in Freetown in late 1970, very shortly thereafter, the geological survey of Sierra Leone advertised for a particular position, for someone who could operate a particular piece of equipment. Lucille was a geology major in college and she made quite a bit of use of that kind of equipment. She

was quite literally the only person in Sierra Leone who knew how to use that equipment. But at that time, spouses were not permitted to work at any job that involved working for the host country government. It didn't matter what the job was, didn't matter what the government was like, what our relationship with them was like. Whether or not the job might pose any threat to U.S. interests in any way, shape, or form. It was just a blanket ban on spouses' working for the host government.

So, she went out and she got a job teaching in a local school. And, she created a supplemental school within the embassy for the American children. In Kaduna, our second posting, amongst other things, she was a television personality and was known to such an extent that on one occasion, we walked together into a hotel in Kano, the major city north of Kaduna, and people immediately recognized her. They didn't recognize me but they knew who she was. Later, when we went to Niger, she was the first CLO [community liaison office] in that post. She wasn't the CLO necessarily by our own choice because it was recommended that the DCM's [deputy chief of mission] wife not be the CLO, but we couldn't get anybody else to apply for the job. So, she took it on and continued in it until I became chargé and that simply wasn't a workable situation. And we did then recruit somebody else to do the job. She was, over our career, twice nominated for the Avis Bohlen Award, once while we were in Lagos and another time, while we were in South Africa. And she won it while we were in South Africa. All along the way, there are a number of other things I could cite but I don't want to go on and on.

CHAVEAS, L: Don't tell the whole story.

CHAVEAS, P: During all of this time, amongst other things, she developed tremendous skills as a hostess and caterer. And the U.S. government was perfectly content to accept tens of thousands of dollars worth of catering work from her without the slightest bit of compensation. When she won the Avis Bohlen Award, we were posted to South Africa, and of course, she was invited to a ceremony and dinner in Washington where that and other awards were being given. And the individual she was dealing with couldn't understand why she said she couldn't be present. Well, the simple airline fare to go home exceeded the amount of the award. By chance, we were undergoing an inspection at that time and one of the senior inspectors was outraged by this situation and went back to Washington and tried to talk somebody into figuring out how to bring her home at government expense. But that failed so her parents attended the event and accepted the award for her.

When we first started out in the service, she was on my efficiency report. She got sterling grades from all of my rating and reviewing officers, but she was being treated like an employee but she wasn't being paid anything. Towards the end of our career, I have already related my frustrations with trying to get Washington to permit spouses to come to Freetown during my last assignment. They compensated her, us, for that by providing a separate maintenance allowance. Did anybody really think that three hundred plus dollars a month was anything resembling enough money to deal with the costs of separate maintenance. Anyway, I could go on and on but I should let her say something.

Q: Let me add one story into this because you are absolutely right. You are covering the pre-1972 period before the "Directive on Wives."

Q: But the story I want to tell is Alfred Atherton was assistant secretary for East Asia, Near East, and we were at his house one time and his wife had us in a corner telling marital stories. And she was saying his first job in the Foreign Service was Cairo and she refused to do all the bandage wrapping and supposed duties that the Foreign Service at that time thought was what spouses were for. So, she was on his evaluation, and she got very bad marks. But by then, they understood he was a very talented member of the Near East family. And so, they sent him back to Washington where his wife would not be on his EER [employee evaluation report] and here she was telling us this, I must say God, but this highly respected officer almost got kicked out of the Foreign Service because his wife wouldn't go along. So, these are important stories.

CHAVEAS, L: Well, when we joined the Foreign Service, they still did something they called the "wives' seminar". I still have my notebook from the wives' seminar, and one of the things they told us right out is, as we were learning to plan a party and carry on a conversation and things like that, was that we could not get our husbands promoted doing all this. They had to be good at their job. However, if they were good at their job and we were not up to par at what we were supposed to be doing, we could hinder their career. So, that was right there the first time.

Q: Let me ask you this. What's your own background? Where did you go to school?

CHAVEAS, L: Oh, I grew up on Long Island and I went to Syracuse University, and then joined the Peace Corps. We met in the Peace Corps, and as Peter said, eighteen days after we were married, which was a month after I was out of the Peace Corps, we were in the Foreign Service. So, that's my background. In college, I worked at the library for pocket money, in the mineralogy professor's lab for pocket money. I was a waitress one summer. One summer, I was in Eastern Kentucky with VISTA [Volunteers in Service to America] working on strip mining issues in Letcher County, Kentucky for the summer. Things like that are not that unusual.

Q: One of the things that intrigued me about the A-100 course was, I mean, half the people in my A-100 course had just come off their Peace Corps assignment---

Q: ---wearing their sandals in Washington in April and it was cold. But the other thing that came up was most of these people were just middle class.

CHAVEAS, L: Yeah, well, my parents were both teachers.

Q: They weren't used to the wine, the entertaining, the accouterments of the Foreign Service. Sounds to me like that is where you came from when you were plugged into the Foreign Service?

CHAVEAS, L: Yes. Well, before I left Senegal where I was a Peace Corps volunteer---I left a little bit early, a couple of weeks early and I had to get permission from the director---and he was a lawyer from somewhere in California. I don't know much about him and why he was Peace Corps director. He just wanted to take a break or something from being a lawyer in California, but he was horrified that I was planning to marry a Foreign Service Officer. He said, "Do you know what you're going to get into?". And he just went on and on about what life would be like in the Foreign Service, not very positively at all. And then, I ended up smack in the wives' seminar which was a shock in itself. Also, some of the rules and the suggestions about things as if we had never been anywhere or done anything. I still have my notebook under the party planning section. They talk about the importance of being organized and ready. And if you had a little extra time, you could rest or read or pretty yourself up beyond the minimum, and it is right there in writing!

So, yes, I was on the efficiency report for the first few years. Then the Directive on Wives came out which didn't have a big impact. We were still in Freetown. Then we went to Kaduna and Kaduna was very small. We served in three consulates or consulates general over the years. It didn't matter whether you were in northern Nigeria or the middle of France, if you were not in the embassy, they would forget you were even there, which had its advantages sometimes. I didn't feel much impact at first from any of that, being small embassies and consulates. But then when we went back overseas in 1980, and by then the FLO [family liaison office], CLO office had started as well as regional psychiatrists in some places. We went to Niger which was a small community really. So, the impact wasn't quite as great, but you could already feel that change. Some spouses didn't come or they came late, or they left early or whatever. We didn't yet have very many tandem couples but that began to change everything as well.

Q: On the other side, could I say that given your Peace Corps experience, the living conditions---

CHAVEAS, L: I was perfectly fine.

Q: ---in Kaduna, were not that much of a surprise?

CHAVEAS, L: No, not at all. We had our first baby in Kaduna and that kept you entertained very much. We didn't need anything else. And as Peter said, I did this TV show once a month. It was a weekly television show but the International Women's Club presented it once a month and got the money to support cataract surgery in a hospital in Kano. And I did it for almost two years, every last Friday of every month. People actually watched Radio Television Kaduna in those days, amazingly enough. But it was fun, and I learned a lot. And we made some very good British friends from our Kaduna days that we are still quite close to. So, the Foreign Service gives you a lot of chances for deep friendships, I think, especially in these smaller places. I guess the biggest embassy we were in was Nigeria.

CHAVEAS, P: Yeah.

CHAVEAS, L: Yeah, because in France, we were in Lyon, in the consulate general. Not in the embassy. In Johannesburg, we were in the consulate general. Not in Pretoria. And it makes a difference, the Embassy kind of forgets where you are sometimes.

Q: Now, in all these different places, you have the Peace Corps, but I mean, how did you find acquiring foods that you were looking for, for your family or for your entertaining?

CHAVEAS, L: Well, in Freetown in the 70s, it was pretty easy. It is a big port and there were some Indian run shops. There was a lot of fresh fish in the market. Seasonal vegetables and fruits that were delicious---the best pineapple ever that you bought just on the street. And because I had been in the Peace Corps, getting around and bargaining and things like that were not a shock. In the wives' seminar, they didn't teach any of that kind of thing, but I managed fine. And in Kaduna, the embassy in Lagos did have a commissary and we were allowed to order things, and with any luck, a truck came up once a month. The spouses would get together, and we divided cases---you had to order by the case and we would sit around with the commissary availability list and say, "Does anybody want to split a case of something and do it that way?". And usually, we got what we ordered. Not always but---

CHAVEAS, P: And despite the rather condescending manner of the wives' course, you did find that table setting exercise valuable.

CHAVEAS, L: Oh, yes. When they did the directive on wives and suddenly cut wives out and stopped training---you still needed to know how to do some things. You needed to know where to seat people or where you should be seated. In fact, many years later in Johannesburg, I realized that the consulate wives, very much younger by then than we were, didn't have a clue about some of these things. So, one day, I just had them all over for lunch and we talked about it. And because the residence was equipped, it was an official residence, I had the fish forks and the fish knives and every size wine glass, and I showed it to them and I said, "This is what this is and this is what that is. And when you get up to an official residence, you are going to have this stuff. You have to know what it is".

CHAVEAS, P: Although these things are much less important in American society today, they are very important in a lot of other societies.

Q: I remember a story from my own A-100 course where the women came back from the wives' afternoon and the men were told to quit. [laughter]. But why? And the wives said, "Well, your silverware has to have a fish fork in it". None of these girls knew what a fish fork was.

CHAVEAS, L: Yes, right.

CHAVEAS, P: We have a funny story about that. When Lucille was in the wives' course and was doing the couple of days related to setting a table and planning a menu, I had a

meeting in the Department with George Trail, the fellow that I was replacing in Freetown. We talked for a good while and I took copious notes and came home that evening with my notes, and I went through those with Lucille. And in the midst of all of this was a note that said, “You give a formal dinner party about twice a year”. And she’d just done this course, she says, “Do you know what we need to give a formal dinner party?”. And we weren't going to an official residence. It wasn't going to be equipped. So, there was a fair amount of panic purchasing at that time and then when we got out to post, we discovered that what George had meant was that twice a year, you would give a dinner party where people might wear a tie.

CHAVEAS, L: But meanwhile, I had bought a bunch of small bowls for finger bowl purposes at Pier 1. Instead of using them as finger bowls, we put peanuts in them. And we call them to this day the George Trail Memorial Finger Bowls.

CHAVEAS, L And my mother was frantically knitting little doily things that you were supposed to put between the saucer and the finger bowl itself. I had to buy hats and I had three sizes of gloves and things like that. We were told to have hats for funerals, hats for weddings, hats for official functions. And the gloves had to be the right length for the right occasion. I didn't know all that. My parents didn't do that kind of thing.

Q: Exactly though, so beyond the---

CHAVEAS, L: And the directive on wives was not the truth of the situation when you were out at a post. They could say in writing all they wanted, that you were a private citizen overseas with no responsibility or relation to the U.S. government but that was never the case. You were always associated with the embassy and had expectations that went with your spouse's expectations. And for years, of course, it was always just wives. There were no male spouses. So, it was a very confusing time overseas. It must have been worse in bigger places than we were in. But by the time we got to France, I remember sitting in our lovely house outside of Lyon one day, quilting. The kids were at school, Peter was working. I was in the house by myself, looking at my house---and it was an official residence so I had all the paraphernalia and stuff---and thinking this house has nothing to do with me. He could have had one spouse or four spouses or no spouses, the house goes with the job and the job is him, not me.

And that was the first time I really thought of it that way and this was in the ‘80s, and the AAFSW [Association of American Foreign Service Women] paid an outside firm to create a questionnaire to send to all members. You didn't have to be a member of the Association of American Foreign Service Women by any stretch of the imagination but they sent it to members. And it was mostly multiple choice things and all and at the end, they said, “Short of being able to pay you for the things you do, what would make you feel better about what you do?”. So, I said that I thought what I contributed in the role I chose made us a tandem couple. If you thought about it, I wasn't an officer but we were a tandem couple.

CHAVEAS, P: It was a partnership.

CHAVEAS, L: Right. So, I said give us the things tandems get such as, where applicable, two consumable allowances, two housing allowances. Let us import two cars. You know, we went to Lagos with one car and Peter didn't have an official car and a driver. If I needed the car, I had to drive him to the embassy every day and pick them up later. And when we went to Niamey, Mike was three and a half, and he loved apple juice, and we were allowed five thousand pounds of consumables. You had to pay for it yourself, but they would ship it, but the tandems got ten thousand pounds of consumables. So, I was rationing my apple juice for my three-year-old to last for two years, you know. And many tandems at that time were young, they didn't have families yet, but they got double these things. And I thought, okay, treat me like a tandem for all these little, not perks, but in these ways and I spelled it out that that would make me feel better. But you know, nothing ever came of that.

I suggested that to AAFSW in 1990 in an open letter to the editor. I suggested it to Ed Perkins when he left Pretoria to become the Director General. And at that point, I had won the Bohlen Award so I felt maybe, I had a little more influence. The only response I ever got was from AAFSW, just a little note that they were told the problem with thinking about paying spouses, anything, was that, okay, the Foreign Service is small. There are not very many of you, we could probably find a way to do this. But if we did it for the Foreign Service spouses, the military spouses would want it and the military was huge. And so, it was never going to fly because of that. But of course, military spouses often got some perks that we didn't get. We lived with the military in Stuttgart for four years, so I had an up-close comparison. They had their PX's and BX's and at that time, they still had space available to fly. They took that away from civilians, just as we were arriving. My timing in the Foreign Service was really bad.

When Peter got to be Ambassador to Malawi, it was the first time for the annual ambassadors' conference after they'd discontinued including spouses. The ambassadors' conference that year was in Washington. They used to be in Washington one year and on the continent the next year. That year it was in Washington and it was in May, and it included Mother's Day, and I was sitting in Malawi in a big lovely house, by myself and Peter was in the States. He got to see the kids. He happened to be there when one of his brothers got married, and I thought, wait a minute. I'm not the FSO. Why am I sitting here by myself? The next year the conference was in Botswana and I went but because we paid my way. So, even that little perk as an ambassador's wife was discontinued by the time we reached that rank.

CHAVEAS, P: You may recall when Larry Eagleburger was the deputy secretary and then for a time, he had a recess appointment as the secretary. He and his wife were both strong advocates for compensating spouses and it seemed to be getting some traction at that time. And as part of that effort, I don't know who did the work, but it was a catalog of compensations that the spouses of other foreign services received was put together, and it was quite impressive. There are all kinds of developed world foreign service organizations, diplomatic corps, which compensate, in one way or another, their spouses.

And so, that was not a valid excuse for us not doing it. And of course, we have a societal problem about monetizing the work that women do in general.

Q: True Lucille, comparing the lifestyle or circumstances of each of the posts, because you've gone from Freetown, Niger, up to Lyon, you know, back down, then Stuttgart, how would you compare the potential or atmospherics of each of those posts? I mean, were they just Peace Corps redux but---

CHAVEAS, L: It is very hard to compare because the size difference and the cultural difference being in France than even being in Niger was extreme. The Foreign Service was not good about making sure spouses spoke languages. I had learned my Peace Corps French in Senegal, and then we waited ten years before we got to Niger and I had to dust off my Peace Corps French. And I looked into taking some courses at the FSI [Foreign Service Institute] to get the French back a little bit. Well, they were very hard to pin down for spouses. They said, "Well, some of them may be on a space available basis. Or if you could come at six in the morning, we can take care of you then". No attempt to be helpful. And I managed---

CHAVEAS, P: Two small children.

CHAVEAS, L: Yes, two small children and living far from the FSI. Anyway, I dusted the French off and it worked in Niger. But we ended up in Lyon and I found myself at dinner parties with the mayor of Lyon and the archbishop and the chancellor of the university, and that old Peace Corps Africa French was not going to do it. So, I went and took a course at the university designed for foreign students who wanted to go to French universities. You had to know French already, but you had to take this course and pass an oral exam and written exam. I had no intention of going to the university for further coursework but that was the best way to improve my French enough so that I could feel a little more comfortable. And then, just by living in France, of course, you are surrounded all the time so that helped a lot.

And then Stuttgart was a real adjustment in its own way. I remember writing my Christmas cards the first year we were there saying, "I'm adapting to two new cultures, the German and the U.S. military". And we were in the barracks, it was a joint command and the differences among Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, commissioned, noncommissioned, I never did figure out what the Navy stripes meant. Stars, I could count but the other was not so clear. But still, we have dear friends in Stuttgart. German friends, and we still keep in touch with some of the Americans we met in Stuttgart. Mostly the civilians. Yeah, it is almost an impossible question, in a way because each was so different.

And then, we ended up back in Sierra Leone and it was a totally different Sierra Leone. It was a totally different time of life. It is one thing when you have your family with you, your kids. You're still missing a lot of family things at home but your children are with you. But as they go off to college and as your parents get older, you really have some conflicts if you are not an officer. I mean, when they opened it up more broadly for

tandem couples, Peter said to me one time, “Why don't you take the Foreign Service exam?”. First of all, I didn't think I could pass the Foreign Service exam.

CHAVEAS, P: Wrong, wrong.

CHAVEAS, L: But I looked at him finally and I said, “Because I don't want to be a Foreign Service Officer”. I would never have done this as an officer. In a way, it was too bad because I could have come out with a pension, we could have had more money now, and I think I could have done some of those jobs, for sure.

CHAVEAS, L: And I should have done it, maybe, but I didn't.

Q: Further, you just mentioned something about not being able to read, maybe, an Army stripes. Did you ever run into a circumstance---because in the Foreign Service, it is ranked in person, the same as in the military. Did you ever run into a circumstance where somebody tried to pull rank, you are, said, you know, “You are only an FSO 3 and I am a 1”.

CHAVEAS, L: No, nobody pulled that. There were very few civilians in the barracks. There was an NSA [National Security Agency] guy and his wife, and there was a CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] guy and his wife. And we were in Stuttgart as it turned out, four years which was unusually long. The first three of those four years, even though our husbands had commensurate ranks---Peter was treated as a lieutenant general---we were not invited to the Officers Wives’ Club. We were not members because we were civilians. And I remember thinking, huh, really? And then, we finally got a deputy commander in chief, a DCINC’s wife, who thought about it and said, “Oh no, they should be allowed to be members of the Officers Wives’ Club and come to those lovely lunches and things like that.

CHAVEAS, P: But within the Foreign Service, no one ever tried to pull rank.

CHAVEAS, L: No, in the Foreign Service or the military. No one tried to pull rank as such that I can remember anyway. I tend not to dwell on things I don't like, so I may have forgotten something but I don't think so.

CHAVEAS, P: The only time that I can recall my rank being mentioned negatively was my first posting before I got there.

CHAVEAS, L: Oh yeah.

CHAVEAS, P: I believe I already recounted what the A-100 course went through to find me the assignment to Freetown, because it was not actually on the list. But it so happened that when we got the assignment to Freetown, the departing DCM [deputy chief of mission] was in town. We had him and his wife over for dinner. And one of the first things he told me was, “This assignment is a mistake. It's an assignment for a second tour officer and they will end up canceling your assignment”. I know personnel, perhaps at the

prompting of this individual, did go out to the post and asked the ambassador what he thought. And he said, “No, this man has been through the Peace Corps. His wife is a former Peace Corps volunteer. They're completely qualified. Bring them on”.

CHAVEAS, L: But wait, did you tell him some of the funny stories with the kids, Foreign Service kids. Those two from Niger, especially the Marines.

CHAVEAS, P: No.

CHAVEAS, L: When we got to Niamey, Peter was the DCM. The kids were three and a half and six and a half. And the three-and-a-half-year-old went to nursery school and then kindergarten, and the other one went to elementary school. Anyway, it was hot in Niger and school was only in the morning. These places didn't have air conditioning, so the kids were at home a lot and playing. And one day, they were playing with another Foreign Service kid, just the three of them, and they got into a big argument. So, finally I had to see what was going on here. It was getting testy. Pam, our daughter, was the oldest of the three. And I said, “What are you arguing about? And she said, “Well, we are playing embassy”. I said, “Yeah”. She says, “And we all want to be Marines”, because we had Marines in Niger. And I said, “Well, there's more than three Marines, you know that. What's the problem?”. And Pam looked at me and she said, “Well, somebody has to be the ambassador. If you don't have an ambassador, you don't need the Marines”. And I died laughing.

CHAVEAS, P: And so did the ambassador.

CHAVEAS, L: And then another time, because Niamey was our first official residence too, I didn't realize how often GSO [general services office] came around to count things and do stuff. The kids caught on to this and they would play GSO. One of them would get a clipboard and go outside the house and knock on the kitchen door, and the other one would open the door and say, “Hey, I'm from GSO and I am here to take inventory”. And they would go into the closet where all the dishes and stuff were kept. And they’d count how many glasses of this and how much, and this was entertainment for Foreign Service kids sometimes. No TV [television] in Niger. Nothing but other kids if you invited them over. Yeah, funny stories about raising children in the Foreign Service.

Q: That raises an interesting question, what was your educational experience for the kids in your various tours?

CHAVEAS, L: Well, Niger was the first one where school was an issue. There was no international British or American School in Niamey. The embassy’s kids went to the French school. And Pam had already done first grade in the States so we decided she would do French first grade. She already knew the basic math and things that first graders do, and she could concentrate on the language. Part of the problem there though was that new embassy kids had to wait about ten days to start school after the other kids had already started because the French had to make sure they had enough slots for the French kids. Even though the embassy gave that school a lot of money. So anyway, Pam was

very upset the first day of school because her friends had all been there for ten days and she hadn't. She wasn't sure of her French. She had already picked up quite a bit of French and we had them tutored a little bit in French.

But after the first day, she got over it and all the embassy kids spoke wonderful French by the end of our time there, which was lucky because most of the spouses didn't. And language training at the embassy was basically set up for the Marines. The Marines were transferred much more frequently. They would always start the French classes at the bottom with whomever was new, and you just never got past lesson four. And a lot of the embassy women relied on their kids to talk to the cook, to talk to the guy at the butcher counter because the kids could speak French and the wives couldn't, and that cut them off from a lot of things in Niger.

At that time, the first year we were there, there was no American Women's Club, there was no International Women's Club. The wife of the deputy chief of mission at the French Embassy and I began to talk about this, because she had a lot of bored or angry spouses in the French Embassy too. We got together and did the paperwork to set up an official club. It was very French, so thank goodness for her, because to set up a nonprofit, charitable organization under the French law, which the Nigeriens had adopted, took a heck of a lot of crazy paperwork. But we did it and we started the International Women's Club of Niger. It was a big success because we met and we would speak English and French, and it had side activities. I taught quilting. You had to be a member of the International Women's Club to learn to quilt and things like that. We had charity events and it gave spouses some things to do, anyway.

CHAVEAS, P: And you also instigated the American school.

CHAVEAS, L: Oh, yeah, that was a big mistake. The overseas schools office at State was run by somebody named Tony Lanza [Anthony Lanza] for years, and he really wanted to get a foothold into Niamey. But they could never get anybody to do it because the kids would adapt so quickly to the French school that there wasn't a lot of pressure to start an American school. But I looked at it, again, as had been the case when we were in Freetown the first time, we only had half a day of school because of the heat. In Freetown I taught at something called the Cotton Tree School, which the embassy ran. It gave the American kids a chance to learn some American social studies, American holidays. They were in a British system in Sierra Leone and it was different so, we were teaching math slightly differently. And it worked very well and the kids loved it.

So, after we got to Niger and all the kids were going to the French school and only basically half a day, I wrote a grant to pay for a teacher---and I had an American wife, not working, certified teacher, ready to work---to set up a similar thing, a tutorial school. The American Tutorial School was going to be just for the American kids. It was going to be two, maybe three days a week, afternoons for a couple hours. And they were going to get English because they weren't learning to read and write in English, and they were going to get a certain amount of American culture via social studies, history. This was elementary school level. Sure enough, we got the grant. We got the money. We lined up

the space. We lined up the teacher and salary agreement and all of that and then we went off to Lyon.

And then, years later in Lagos, Tony Lanza came out from Washington to look at the American School and he got introduced to me, and he recognized my name immediately. He said, “Oh, I am so glad to be able to thank you. Because by then, there was an English language American system school in Niger and the American Embassy kids stopped going to the French school. The school was running,and it had. all kinds of kids of various nationalities whose parents wanted them to speak English. And that was the end of learning French in Niamey for American kids and I thought that was terrible.

CHAVEAS, P: We've always been struck by how many Foreign Service kids come out of their foreign service experience without speaking a foreign language.

CHAVEAS, L: Yes. Too many American schools.

CHAVEAS, L: Anyway. They turned it into an American school and was a big success, and apparently helped a lot in getting people to bid on Niger so the embassy was really happy with the whole situation. But I always thought it was a mistake in the long run. I shouldn't have done it.

Q: Let me ask you about combining entertaining and politics? Did you have any really interesting Fourth of July stories?

CHAVEAS, L: Interesting. I dreaded the Fourth of July and I'm so happy here on the Fourth of July, I don't have to do anything.

CHAVEAS, P: She was extraordinary on the Fourth of July.

CHAVEAS, L: My big worry most of the time was the weather in a place like Lyon. It was a huge Fourth of July and we did it at the residence. We had a huge residence, a beautiful thing, but the reception had to be outside. So, for three years, I was a nervous wreck on the Fourth of July about the weather. But I decided that it had to be American, as American as we could make it. So, in terms of the food, I kept it as American as I could make it. Have you ever lived in France and you had to go to French cocktail parties? They run as if it was a mini meal. There are appetizer type things. There are fish course type things, and all the way through to dessert. So, I spent months making spritz cookies, red, white and blue stars and mini brownies and mini chocolate chips and mini peanut butter. All these more typically American things.

CHAVEAS, P: Miniature hamburgers.

CHAVEAS, L: Yeah, and turkey and ham and cheese and turkey and cranberry sauce, little things and all of that. It was a big hit, especially with the Americans who came. They were like, “Whoa”, chocolate chips and things like that because I could get some stuff from the commissary in Paris.

CHAVEAS, P: She also oversaw Thanksgiving dinner for a hundred Peace Corps volunteers in Malawi.

CHAVEAS, L: Yes that was in Malawi. Entertaining the Peace Corps was much easier. They're grateful for anything.

CHAVEAS, P: But in great quantities.

CHAVEAS, L: Right, just have enough of it and you are fine. Whatever it is. And then years later, our son was a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco and the embassy invited him for Thanksgiving one year. So, I felt good about that.

Q: How about Fourth of July in some of your African postings?

CHAVEAS, L: I was not in charge of it as such until---

CHAVEAS, P: Malawi.

CHAVEAS, L: ---until Malawi and I would get my mother to send stuff, send Hershey's Kisses wrapped in red, white, and blue so I could have it on the table. And chocolate chips so I could make chocolate chip cookies and things like that. It was the dry season in Malawi and in fact, it was cool. And we, again, had a beautiful garden so that was easy. One year, we had background music. We had a pianist and I had him play only American music, musical standards, things like that.

CHAVEAS, P: Show tunes, he loved.

CHAVEAS, L: Yes. And tried to make it feel like it was ours and not just another bloody cocktail party you have to stand up with.

CHAVEAS, P: You did it in Niger as well.

CHAVEAS, L: Well, sort of.

CHAVEAS, P: When I was chargé.

CHAVEAS, L: Oh yes, when you were chargé. That's right, I forgot you were chargé, and you were sick that Fourth of July.

CHAVEAS, P: I was kind of propped up against the wall.

CHAVEAS, L: But the standards you felt you had to meet in Niger were different than in Lyon.

CHAVEAS, P: Yes, and mentioning Lyon, I should add that our final Fourth of July was only days before we left post, and we had more than four hundred people there. The following Sunday, the Features section of the local paper had a big photo of Madame Chaveas on the front cover. “The Triumph of Mrs. Chaveas”, it read.

Q: Well, were there any special aspects to Joburg in terms of entertaining or facilities?

CHAVEAS, L: Well, the house was alright. The garden was big. When we walked into that kitchen in Johannesburg and I saw four wall ovens and eight burners, I knew I was in trouble. There were expectations here. But it was still apartheid when we were there so entertaining could be a little tricky. What did we do on the Fourth of July? It was the embassy that---

CHAVEAS, P: No, we didn't do Fourth of July.

CHAVEAS, L: Right.

CHAVEAS, P: Because of apartheid.

CHAVEAS, L: Yes, okay.

CHAVEAS, P: Until the final year we were there, as things started to open up. We decided it was appropriate to have a big function. We did it at the USIS [United States Information Service] library in Soweto.

CHAVEAS, L: Yeah, no wonder I can't remember the Fourth of July in Johannesburg. Yeah.

CHAVEAS, P: Making a point of always doing social functions where we were mixing races was always interesting. And ironically enough, we had one dinner where all of the invitees were white. We were giving a farewell for the econ commercial counselor from Pretoria who was a friend, and we left the guest list up to him. As it ended up, all of his invitees were white people. Well, that night, all of the cars of our invitees were vandalized in one way or another.

CHAVEAS, L: One was stolen.

CHAVEAS, P: One was stolen. Some tires were flattened and so on. And in time, the embassy, through its security folks, was able to determine it was the police that did it thinking that once again, we were entertaining a mixed-race group.

CHAVEAS, L: But in Johannesburg, I did work as a PIT (, part-time, intermittent, and temporary) handling the little Self-Help money that the consulate got. And I was a CLO for a while, so that was a PIT job too. Did I do any other PIT jobs? I don't think so.

CHAVEAS, P: No, that was all.

CHAVEAS, L: Yes.

CHAVEAS, P: But you were CLO in Niamey.

CHAVEAS, L: In Niamey, yes, so twice I worked in the embassy or consulate.

CHAVEAS, P: In inventing the term PIT, the Department demonstrated its talent for belittling people.

CHAVEAS, L: Went from cookie pusher to PIT. Anyway, when we were in South Africa, I did a lot of quilting and there was a big South African quilt guild in the Johannesburg area. It met four times a year, twice in English, twice in Afrikaans. And I was doing some research on my own on a particular style of sunbonnet worn in the 19th century that is quilted. I would call museums, and these were Afrikaner artifacts so I was calling museums that had Afrikaner collections and staff. And I would not say I was with the American consulate, I just explained what I wanted to do and everybody was always very helpful about it. I wrote a monograph for one of the museums while we were there.

But when the women realized I was, first of all an American, which didn't take long, and then from the consulate, the response turned, they were always a bit surprised. They would say, you know, Americans come to South Africa and they want to study Zulu baskets and belly beads, and nobody ever thinks that the Afrikaner did anything worth looking at and studying. So, I got to know the two curators at the big museum in Pretoria fairly well. I started including them in lunches and things. And then, quilting is huge in South Africa and it was growing as we were there. They had a big quilt festival in Durban while we were in Joburg and invited a well-known American quilter at that time and she had to come and go through Joburg. So, I had her over to the house and I knew black quilters and white quilters and so, had a reception for her that everybody came to because they all knew this American and mixed up the two groups of quilters, which was a lot of fun for everybody. We all had a good time actually. Then I gave the opening address at the festival in Durban.

CHAVEAS, P: You also mixed the American spouses with Mrs. Perkins.

CHAVEAS, L: As I've said, if you are in a consulate, you can often be forgotten. And we went to Pretoria once in a while, not very often. Peter went more often but I didn't. Anyway, spouses further down the pecking order never got invited to anything in Pretoria. And they were very curious about Mrs. Perkins so I gave a lunch just for Mrs. Perkins and the American spouses at the consulate. She was charming, Mrs. Perkins, absolutely charming. And the spouses were so pleased to finally meet her, because they were never included in big receptions and things like that. By then, it was the late '80s and the Foreign Service paid less and less attention, let's put it that way, to spouses. Spouses have a big impact on morale for the whole place. And we saw divorces and things so it was not always easy, and especially if somebody was unhappy or angry at the State Department.

Before Peter went to Malawi, we did the ambassador's course. I did what spouses were allowed to do. He got to do more. But it got more and more insulting because you were official for this and this and this, and you were not official for that, and that and that. So, you cannot accept memberships in golf or tennis clubs. You can't accept gifts. Now, I would say, “But wait a minute, last week you said I was unofficial. So, this week I'm official? Why can't I accept the invitation or the membership or something? Make up your mind”. It was still not done by the 1990s.

CHAVEAS, P: The absurdity of it, for me, was underlined when they talked about the fact that if we were going to some major representational event, which amongst other things required that Lucille have her hair properly done, my car could not be used to take her to the beauty parlor. Nor could my car be used to pick her up at the residence, and bring her to the embassy, so that we could go on to the event. I had to get in the car, drive to the house and then we could go to the event because I was in the car. Even if it made much more sense to do it the other way in terms of burning gas, for instance. We ignored all of those requirements and---

CHAVEAS, L: And nobody turned us in.

CHAVEAS, P: Nobody turned us in, but how absurd can you get in treating your employees, like they were children?

CHAVEAS, L: When we were in Niamey and Peter was chargé, one day he came home from the embassy, and he was just not feeling well. It was Nigerian National Day and we really liked Nigeriens and we wanted to go, but he didn't feel like he could go and it was too late to call a junior officer and say, “You have got to take my place”. And I said, “Well, I will go”. I even had a special dress for Nigerien National Day. So, I went out to the car. The driver, Boubacar, was out there and he had the flags on the car and was ready to take us to this official event. And I said, “Boubacar, he is not coming. I'm going to be the only one going”. Boubacar looked at me and he went to the front of the car and he rolled up the flags and covered them. He knew that I didn't have the right even though I was the only one from the embassy going. The driver knew, he knew the rules.

Q: Was there a posting at some point where you ran into a terrible shortage or terrible equipment loss?

CHAVEAS, P: We almost ran out of water in Malawi but I've already mentioned that story.

CHAVEAS, L: Nothing I can think of. On the whole, our housing was always really wonderful. In Kaduna, when we first got there, the furniture was a disaster. But eventually, the consul got new furniture, we inherited his old furniture so that solved that problem. I mean, the furniture was so bad that if you sat on the sofa the wrong way, you fell through the slats. It was so worn-out.

CHAVEAS, L: It was crazy but we eventually got that taken care of. But the lack of a certain kind of control would get on your nerves once in a while. We were in France and the admin guy, a Frenchman, terrific guy, came to the house one day with new sterling flatware and he said, “Oh, this is the new stuff they have just decided everybody should have and I have to take the old stuff”. Well, the new stuff was only service for twelve. The old stuff was service for eighteen and I wanted to keep both because we often had more people than that in the house. But he had instructions from Washington that he had to take the old stuff back and ship it back and I wouldn't let him. I don't know how Alain got himself out of that bind. That was his problem. I kept the new stuff and the old stuff but nobody had told me this was going to happen.

CHAVEAS, P: An edict from Washington just arrived. Alain prospered. He went on to higher positions in Paris.

CHAVEAS, L: It didn’t ruin his career. In Malawi, they sent us without notice new bedroom furniture for the master bedroom. Well, it looked terrible. It didn't suit the house at all. It was big, kind of a federal colonial four poster bed and all, and we had a very contemporary house in Malawi. And I said, “Well, we will keep the old stuff”. Well, I couldn't do that.

Q: Well, along those lines, what is the background to this Bohlen Award?

CHAVEAS, L: I was always busy and involved at every post.. When I got nominated in Lagos, I really thought that was very nice but I didn't get it. I had no idea I had even been nominated.

Q: What was the nomination? I mean, what was it---

CHAVEAS, L: Well, I did a lot of different things in Lagos, including rescue the American Women's Club at one point from near disaster when---when we got there, I got talked into running for vice president. I always love being vice president of anything, you didn't have to be in charge of anything. So, I said, “Oh sure, I'll be the vice president of the Women's Club”. But the president that year, she just was not doing her job and she was alienating a lot of people. Her husband worked for an oil company. Anyway, she went home that summer and decided not to come back, so suddenly, I was the president and none of the preparation for the big annual bazaar had actually been done. And on and on, so, we had to throw that together and it worked out very well. What else did I do in Lagos? I taught quilting. I was on the board of the projects committee of the Nigerian Women's Society too.

CHAVEAS, P: And for significant periods, you were the senior spouse.

CHAVEAS, L: The ambassador's youngest daughter was a senior in high school so they weren't going to move her to Lagos for her last year and so, his wife Helen didn't come out to post very often. And the DCM’s wife, was he even married at that point? Anyway, there was no spouse there either. Peter was not technically the next ranking officer. The

admin officer outranked him. But when things would happen and somebody had to be entertained, I ended up, more often than not, organizing---

CHAVEAS, P: Including entertaining Mrs. Schultz.

CHAVEAS, L: George Schultz came out and Mrs. Schultz had a separate lunch at our house. It turned out to be a lot of fun. She was terrific. But she was on a very tight schedule. Half of the invitees were Americans. Not all from the embassy, we had oil company wives as well. And half were Nigerians. There were only thirteen of us as it turned out, so, not a huge lunch. But making sure Nigerians arrived at anything on time was a real challenge. But they did, they all pitched up.

I put Mrs.Schultz right in the middle of the table, instead of at one end or the other, and we sat down and the first thing she did was say, “I know we are on a limited time here and I want to know as much about all of you as possible. So, please go ahead and eat and I am going to tell you some things about me. And then, we will go around the table”. And she told about her career as a nurse and meeting George, and life as his wife. It was very personal and fun and then we went around the table. I learned so much from those Nigerians. They talked about themselves. They knew each other really well because they were all pretty high up ladies and they would say to each other, “Well, don't forget to tell her this about you, and don't---". You know, oh, it was wonderful. I took a lesson from Mrs. Schultz in that.

But before she came, they had an advanced team come out and look at our house. Mrs. Schultz had a hip problem and she couldn't climb upstairs. Well, there were like four steps in from the front and three from the back or two, but you had to go through the banana trees to come in the back way. So, they said, “Okay, she will come in and she has to have a place to rest. And she can't go upstairs”. So, I rearranged a whole room downstairs. Then they walked around the living room and they looked at my rocking chair. The only piece of personal furniture I used to schlep around the world was my Boston rocker. And they looked at it and they said, “Oh, that is an inappropriate piece of furniture. You'll have to remove that”.. What do you mean it is an inappropriate piece of furniture?

Anyway, I didn't move it. They’ll just go away and they weren't going to be there that day anyway. I was so hoping Mrs. Schultz would sit in it but she didn't. She sat in the chair next to it but I let the inappropriate piece of furniture stay. But they would do things like that. The message just got worse and worse for spouses about what you can do and can't do and what you have to do or not, whatever.

Q: Those presidential or secretarial trips are a challenge to the whole mission up and down. But explain to me again what the Avis Bohlen Award is?

CHAVEAS, L: Well, it is not a Foreign Service award. It's an AFSA [American Foreign Service Association] award for eligible family members overseas. I still have it downstairs. I haven’t thrown the certificate away yet, the piece of paper. It is for eligible

family members “for relations with the American and foreign communities at a Foreign Service post that have done the most to advance American interests.” It is only for spouses and now, several men have gotten it in recent years. They give it on Foreign Service Day.

While we were in Johannesburg though, another interesting thing involved the wife of the American ambassador in Chad who was killed when the UTA [*Union de Transports Aériens*] flight was bombed out of Fort-Lamy, or out of N’Djamena. She was going home a little early because their daughter was getting married. Not home definitively, just home on vacation to help organize the daughter's wedding. And she died in the plane crash. I didn't know her but I heard from people who did, she was quite well liked. And shortly after that, Mickey Leland went to Ethiopia and his plane crashed. The country AID [United States Agency for International Development] director and his wife were with Mickey Leland, on that plane. Well, the next year, when Foreign Service Day came around, they put the AID officer's name on that plaque recognizing people who have died overseas. Nobody put his wife's name on it and she was with him because it was her “job.”. Nobody put Bonnie Pugh’s name up. There were no spouses on that plaque at all. So, I wrote a letter to the Foreign Service journal and complained about this situation. And now there is a plaque but it is nowhere near the plaque where the officers are. It is somewhere down by the cafeteria, I think. But they at least acknowledge when a spouse or dependent family member, eligible family member dies in the line of service. They never explained what we were eligible for. They just changed the name from dependent to eligible.

CHAVEAS, P: You know, you were asking about specific things Lucille had done in Lagos and she enumerated several of them. But she was constantly doing things to give the community cohesion. And the one that comes to my mind took place in Niger, not in Nigeria. She was the den mother for the Marines. Every Marine got a birthday cake. She knew their birthdays and every birthday, they got a birthday cake.

CHAVEAS, L: They were kids.

CHAVEAS, P: When they needed new stripes sewn on, Lucille was the seamstress. And throughout our career, she did those kinds of things for people in the community. Not just the official community but particularly the official community.

CHAVEAS, L: But those Marines were such fun. The kids loved them, they would have spaghetti dinners at the Marine house. The Marines would throw the kids in the pool and horse around. But they were eighteen and nineteen years old. They were hardly more than kids themselves. And we had a big advantage, one of our Marines got sent to Paris. He requested Paris after Niger and got it. And when we were going down to Lyon, the kids were still kind of young to live in a hotel room on their own. Well, we really had to do something in Paris on our way down to post, and Juan was off duty that night and the kids knew Juan from Niger, and Juan baby sat for us. This probably broke some rule. So, it paid off baking Juan a birthday cake. He babysat one night. Small posts especially were

very community oriented or else they were very difficult. And especially with a foreign language thrown in the mix. Kaduna was English so that was a different story but.

Q: When I was on a promotion panel one time, one of the things that we noticed was there was a great differentiation between the rank of the senior officers and the rank of the junior officers, consular officers, and whatnot. And I would assume that that also meant that their spouses were pretty darn new to the game. Did you find yourself playing den mother to some young spouses?

CHAVEAS, L: Oh yes, over the years. I did often, and especially when I was CLO and other times, but my antenna for certain things is not out there. When we were in Lagos, I used to jog with a woman who was a part time nurse in our health unit. And one day, we were jogging along and she was asking me all kinds of questions, I had no idea what she was getting at. And finally, I turned around and Myra had stopped dead in her tracks, and she was the faster runner. And she looked at me and she said, "You don't have a clue what I'm getting at, do you?". I said, "No". And I guess there was some affair or something going on that had come to the attention of that health unit, the medical unit, because it was creating some problems. And Myra was hoping to get some insight about the wife in this triangle or whatever it was.

As much as I knew a lot about people and did a lot in the community, I had no idea what she was talking about. And years later, when we left Niger, Peter's secretary came through Lyon, stayed with us for a few days. And the two of them started talking about people in Niger when we were there, and I said, "Wait a minute, what are you telling me? So and so was sleeping with so and so?". I mean, I just don't have my antenna out for that kind of stuff, I guess.

CHAVEAS, P: But on the other hand, how many times did somebody come by at tea or just around---

CHAVEAS, L: All the time.

CHAVEAS, P: ---and found you to be somebody they could vent to, that they could---

CHAVEAS, L: That got less, less frequent the higher Peter got. That was another thing in the Foreign Service, you could come in kind of under the radar and do all kinds of things and make friendships. The higher in rank you got, the more difficult that became. It took us a long time in Malawi before I could get people to just drop by the residence. Many people did not have phones and the idea of always having to plan ahead, a thing I wasn't used to. I wanted people, spouses and people, to come by. I said, "If I'm not here, I'm not here but you know, don't worry about interrupting anything". And it took a long time to get people to relax a little around you. But yeah, the higher you got, the harder it got for me.

Q: In one sense, our discussion today leads me to say if you are running this spouse course now, what would be the first three rules that you would put out there?

CHAVEAS, L: Rules. I don't know about rules

Q: Or pieces of advice?

CHAVEAS, L: You know, the Foreign Service has changed so much. There are fewer and fewer families overseas and spouses in any kind of traditional role by my standards. There are more and more tandem couples. By the time we left Freetown, they were making a concerted effort to start building compounds and have everything and everyone in it. The school, if there was a commissary or school, that would be behind walls. Everybody would live in the same big compound. Remember, General Williams.

CHAVEAS, P: The head of Overseas Buildings.

CHAVEAS, L: Because the embassy in Freetown was going to be rebuilt from the ground up and security had become such an issue. I really would have had a hard time with that. We didn't live like that. We lived out in neighborhoods and did whatever we wanted, and took taxis and whatever to get around. So, rules now, what do you tell wives? You would still need I think to have some kind of brush up on entertaining, in a formal sense of the word. If you are going to send people out to have dinner in Paris and this and that with high-ranking people, you should know where to put the fish fork and the fish knife. You really, you really should.

CHAVEAS, P: That goes for the officers too.

CHAVEAS, L: Well, yes.

CHAVEAS, P: What to do with a fish knife.

CHAVEAS, L: Right, and a fish fork. And where to sit on the sofa and how to get in and out of the car. Things like that. I think you probably still need to know that. But women just don't take that kind of position anymore. I'm not sure you could even call it a spouses' course, I don't know.

CHAVEAS, P: Remember when we started this conversation today, I said she told me that she wouldn't marry me if it included the Foreign Service.

CHAVEAS, L: We didn't join the Foreign Service thinking it was a career. We enjoyed it. He kept getting promoted and after a while, you know, it became a career. But we didn't start out that way.

Q: Well, let me ask, what are Pam and Mike's impressions of your Foreign Service career and their experiences in it?

CHAVEAS, L: Well, they enjoyed it.

Q: I am asking that because I am under the impression that a lot of kids either continue to travel to get jobs with international companies or whatnot, or they go home and never move again.

CHAVEAS, L: Yes, I think that's true. Well, our kids, Mike, joined the Peace Corps when he got out of undergraduate school. And for a while, within the Forest Service, he worked in their Office of International Programs out of Washington and covered a big hunk of Africa. He stopped doing that after they had a baby, because he used to go out for four to six weeks at a time working with the Ministry of Water and Forests in different African countries. He didn't want to be away from his young kids so he switched to the domestic side.

Pam likes to travel but they don't have disposable income. She googled a few years ago the American International School in Johannesburg, which is huge now compared to when she and Mike went and realized hey, maybe I should get a job with overseas schools. But there is another career to think about in that family so she hasn't done it. But they are not averse to traveling at all. They both kept their French. Mike picked up *Berber* in Morocco. No, I think they looked at it very positively. We were very lucky. We were never evacuated. Our children were never seriously ill. Pam---no, that is not true.

CHAVEAS, P: Not true.

CHAVEAS, L: Yeah, we were medivaced when Pam was thirteen and a half months old, out of Kaduna for idiopathic febrile seizures, which means nothing. She had seizures and nobody ever figured out why. But they sent us to London for a week for a bunch of tests, and then they sent us back to Kaduna, which I don't think they would do now.

CHAVEAS, P: The seizures never repeated themselves.

CHAVEAS, L: Yes, they never came back so we don't know what happened there. But on the whole, we were very lucky. We were lucky with their education. The school in Niger was very good. Mike's preschool and kindergarten were very good. Then we went to Lyon, they already spoke French. We lived in a village outside of Lyon and they walked to the French school with all the other kids. And French education is easy to transfer from place to place because it is a national system. If you are in a French school, whether you are in Fiji or Niger or Senegal, or any little village in France, you are on the same page, in the same book, at the same time, in the first grade and the second grade. So, it was quite easy and the first year in Lagos, the kids opted to go to the French school. Then, we pushed the American school because we thought we were going back to the States after Lagos. Mike had never been to an English language school, but the first year there, they went to the French school. And we got them tutored in English.

CHAVEAS, P: And after Joburg, I was offered a chief of mission assignment out of Joburg but turned it down immediately because the kids were in high school or about to go into high school. At that point, we wanted to make sure that they did have an

American high school experience. We stayed home at that point until Mike went into college.

CHAVEAS, L: But we had been overseas for ten years anyway, it was time to go home. And that is another thing the Foreign Service forgets about children. Lyon was not a hardship post, I wonder why. It is a three-year tour and if you want to go back to the States, you have to pay your own way. There was no R&R [rest and recreation]. So, I never did go home. I stayed in France for the whole three years happily. We had lots of visitors including family. However, for children I think it's different. We got to Lyon when they were almost six and almost nine. Three years is a big hunk of your life when you are a six-year-old. And they only spoke French all the time, even to each other. We sent them home on their own and they spent three weeks with my parents and three weeks with Peter's parents one summer. I think the Foreign Service doesn't realize that these are still American kids and maybe France is nice, but maybe you want them to remember who they are. And all these policies could well be different. I have no idea what they do now with those sorts of issues. I have the impression a lot of them are irrelevant because the Foreign Service has changed so much.

CHAVEAS, P: Based on our last assignment and what I do know, since then, Foreign Service has become more and more a service of unaccompanied officers either because the spouse has a career that takes him or her elsewhere or they are part of a tandem, but there are not two assignments in the same post. Or it is much more a service of singles, divorcees, or separated.

CHAVEAS, L: Where there is no school or there is danger.

Q: Also in this current time, all these danger posts are unaccompanied to begin with.

CHAVEAS, P: Yes, such as Freetown at the time we went there the second time.

CHAVEAS, L: When he was sitting in Freetown unaccompanied in a house that I knew, I sent him an email one day and I said, "They just found a case of malaria in Loudoun County, Virginia, there is a sniper running around Washington D.C. and they put the danger code post 9/11 up to orange", I said. "And you are the one getting the danger pay! What is wrong with this picture?". But it was true, he was getting danger pay. He left October 1, right after 9/11, when the country was just crazy anyway, and then that sniper if you remember that at all.

Q: Yeah.

CHAVEAS, P: And meanwhile, as I explained in an earlier session, I was battling with the Department to try and convince them that Freetown wasn't nearly as dangerous as they described it.

CHAVEAS, L: I would hesitate to think that any of this experience is relevant anymore. We have been out of the Foreign Service for a long time, and everything seems so changed. Much change happened even while we were in the Service.

CHAVEAS, P: But just to sum up, I think we look back on our Foreign Service life very positively. We enjoyed not necessarily all of the specific work, not from day to day or some of the things that the institution required or wouldn't permit. But it was a lifestyle and work that we basically enjoyed for thirty-four years.

CHAVEAS, L: And we have a house full of tchotchkes that our children don't want.

Q: The Smithsonian museum is looking for you.

CHAVEAS, L: Yes, I have already given some things to the museum.

CHAVEAS, P: Just to put a final point on the institution. I believe earlier, I described the rinky-dink retirement ceremony that I got in the DG's [director general] office.

CHAVEAS, L: Where they got my name wrong. I thought this was just the icing on the cake.

CHAVEAS, P: In response to that, I quickly reformulated the remarks I had in my head and spent my five minutes talking about how the Foreign Service has to do far better by its spouses.

CHAVEAS, L: Right. Do you know anything about this book that came out in 1981? They had a whole symposium called "Diplomacy, The Role of the Wife". It is very interesting if you get your hands on an old copy of it. But it is so out of date, it is unbelievable. The "role of the wife".

Q: Yeah, well, I still have, and you have probably seen it, that pamphlet they passed out in the wives' course that talked about, you know, how you bend your cards?

CHAVEAS, L: Oh, yeah. Right. Calling cards. We had almost no money when we started and those calling cards had to be engraved, not printed. It cost us a small fortune. And little note cards also, engraved and a silver tray to put them in.

CHAVEAS, P: And one of the stories that every spouse heard early on was the story of the wife of a particular political appointee back in that era. The classic dragon lady. The woman who required that every spouse in the mission keep a chilled bottle of her favorite champagne on stock, in case she decided to drop in.

CHAVEAS, L: We never met any of those people---

CHAVEAS, P: No, we never did.

CHAVEAS, L: ---so we were really lucky. But in the wives' seminar, when I took it, they had a guy from Defense Intelligence as a speaker. He says to us, "Now, never let it be known that you have a favorite drink. Every time you go to a cocktail party or something, ask for something different". He said, "Because if they know you have a favorite drink, they like to embarrass Americans overseas, and they will put something in the drink to make you ill". He said, "So, if you do go to something and you are feeling fine, and you have a drink and suddenly you don't feel so well". And he took his suit jacket and he pulled it out, "Vomit into your dress and send it back to us so we can analyze it". And I was sitting there, you know, fresh out of the Peace Corps going, "Whoa".

Q: Now, that is an interesting story because security, the building and whatnot, is also part of the Foreign Service life. And past this introduction, did your security officers or other things sort of impact on what you thought you could and couldn't do?

CHAVEAS, L: They tried in Lagos, yeah. When we got there they had new family members, not kids, but the spouses at least for a little meeting and the security officer got up to---

Q: Where was this? I am sorry.

CHAVEAS, P: In Lagos.

CHAVEAS, L: This was in Nigeria. Yeah, Nigeria. He got up and he tried to scare the daylights out of all of us. He said, "Don't do this, don't do that, and pickpockets and---", it just went on and on. And a lot of these wives have never been to Africa before. They were convinced they couldn't leave their house and I disagreed with that. And then when, Peter probably told you about the time that they had the shooting in France, the consul in Strasbourg. Well, our kids had been used to walking back and forth to school by themselves. It was very close in this little village and suddenly, it was suggested that I walk them to school and pick them up. The kids couldn't understand, and I didn't want to get into too many details with them. They were in elementary school, you know, six- and nine-year-olds, and I thought, "No, I just need the exercise" and things like that. That didn't last a terribly long time. I didn't disagree with that but that security officer in Lagos, and our regional medical officer too in Lagos, he was not in favor of going to markets and dealing with Nigerians.

CHAVEAS, P: A group of us were sitting around the embassy pool in Lagos one afternoon and the doctor proceeded to tell us and others that anyone who chose to get to know Nigerians had a psychiatric problem. And he was looking right at us, because---

CHAVEAS, L: We already knew and enjoyed Nigerians.

Q: That illustrates that the Foreign Service life has multiple facets to it.

CHAVEAS, P: Yeah.

Q: Some fun, some humorous, some serious and some unnecessarily serious. But anyway, with that, I want to thank you two. This has been a lot of fun Lucille. Thank you, my dear.

CHAVEAS, L: You're welcome. You are very welcome.

CHAVEAS, P: Thank you. Thank you.

Q: Yeah, let him hang around some more.

CHAVEAS, L: Okay, right.

Q: Okay gang, we'll catch up with you. Peter, pleasure sir.

CHAVEAS, P: Likewise, thank you very much. You know, when we started, even before we started, I was very hesitant because I thought I would forget a lot of things or get things out of sequence. Forget names particularly. And that has proven to be true but on the other hand, it has brought back a lot of memories. It has been an interesting exercise.

End of interview