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# MARY KAY DAVIS

*Interviewed By: Jewell Fenzi*
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## INTERVIEW

DAVIS: You asked if I thought the Foreign Service had anything to do with the breakup

of the marriage, but no I didn't really think so, but that the Foreign Service does put stress on a marriage. The moving and changing places all the time and that for me, I was thirty years old when my former husband and I took our first post, and so I was considerably older and I had a lot of work experience. I had also worked at the State Department as a civil servant for six years before that, so I had some feeling for the Foreign Service and international affairs, you could say. I had a lot of work experience and for me was very difficult for me to be suddenly in a place where my only contact with the world was through my husband. I felt I had no identity of my own; I had no routine. Now it sounds wonderful, but I could do whatever I wanted and I felt guilty because I didn't have a job. I didn't have my own set of friends. I didn't have anyone to go on coffee break with at ten-o'clock in the morning if I wanted to. And, plus, I didn't speak the language. I felt very isolated.

But I loved it. When I found out we were going to Italy, I was delighted. I had been there on vacation and I just thought it was a terrific place to go. It was a wonderful experience. I would have stayed longer if they would have let us. I have very warm feelings for Italy.

*Q: You were in Rome?*

DAVIS: I was in Rome, yes.

*Q: And your husband was..?*

DAVIS: He was the assistant agricultural attaché. That was his first post.

*Q: If you weren't working what did you do?*

DAVIS: Actually I did start working after about a year. I did have some problems with the Foreign Service on that. At that time, it was '76, so spouses were starting to be able to work, which I was delighted with. I went to the embassy, and they would only hire me as a foreign service staff person, at the lowest salary, because I didn't have shorthand. I had even had a couple of years of secretarial experience, because that was the way I put myself through college. But I thought I'd do it.

Actually I had a couple of interesting jobs. I worked at the entomology lab which they have there. They do a lot of tests on natural predators, insects. I was typing, but I liked to talk to the biologists who were there. They would go around and collect insects that ate weeds that had been imported to the U.S. in grain shipments hundreds of years ago. They were looking for something that would eat thistle but not eat artichoke. They travelled all over the Mediterranean and into eastern European countries collecting bugs. They had some problems with being stopped by the KGB and other security agents.

*Q: You never went along?*

DAVIS: No, I never went along, but I did go out and look at the bugs. They told a funny story about how they were looking for something that would eat poppies. This was a

really secret project several years before. And they found something that would eat only poppies. They tried it in Turkey and it was very successful except that they said the farmers could move the poppy fields faster than the insects could find them. Then I worked for the...

*Q: Was that supposed to be a heroin control.*

DAVIS: Yes, the poppy project was to stop the flow of opium.

*Q: And heroin is an opium derivative.*

DAVIS: But that was probably in the sixties I'd guess. At that time they were working on a project that would eat thistle which, I guess, can ruin an agricultural crop, but not eat artichoke. That was fun. They'd go out and feed their little bugs every day and see what they ate and see that they didn't eat anything else.

And I worked for the representative to the FAO [United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization]. Now it's an ambassadorial post, but then it was a new post. And then I worked most of the time for USIA [U.S. Information Agency], which is more in my field. I started out there typing the ambassador's correspondence and then I started drafting replies and gradually they gave me more and more responsibilities, gave me more money. I just thought it was fascinating. I thought that the USIA people were certainly more in touch with the rest of Italy than anybody else in the embassy.

*Q: Of course that's their job.*

DAVIS: And they spoke better Italian than anybody else in the embassy. They had more contacts. Granted they were probably the sots of contacts that I was more interested in, cultural and literary contacts and academic contacts. I really enjoyed that a lot.

*Q: What were you doing before you went to Rome?*

DAVIS: I was working in the public affairs office at the State Department writing pamphlets. One of my first projects at State was the protocolling, diplomatic usage.

*Q: "Social Usage in the Foreign Service" it used to be. Did you revise it?*

DAVIS: Revise it, yes. As I was reading it, this was several years before, I guess even before I was married, and I thought, "My god! This sounds like something from the forties."

*Q: I was going to ask you, what was your reaction to it? Did you not believe it, or...*

DAVIS: It was sort of fascinating. I thought it was a little archaic. When I worked at State the Women's Action Organization, I think it was started then. There were a number of cases pending against State, they were starting to rehire women who been Foreign

Service Officers who had to quit when they got married.

*Q: Do you know that that we discovered the other day they didn't have to quit. It was traditional, it was expected that they would quit. And so there were suits filed against State for women to come back in who had been officers?*

DAVIS: Well, they were allowed to come back in whether it was the result of suits or not.

*Q: I'd be interested in knowing what those suits were, if they were filed by women members of WAO for some reason or other or by the spouses themselves. You don't know?*

DAVIS: No, but the name that comes to me is Alison Palmer. There was a special program that State had started to recruit women to make up for this obvious imbalance of Foreign Service Officers [FSOs]. I think it was at a grade 12 level, which in 1971 or 72 was quite high for a woman in the government. We had 3700 applicants by GS-12s throughout the government and they found one woman who was qualified! They said they would hire her just as soon as they had a place for her. I thought these people were not serious about this program.

*Q: Do you remember who that was? Did they hire her eventually?*

DAVIS: I don't know. I think we went overseas before I ever found out the end of the story. I think State had some problems. I think it's probably better now.

*Q: How long were you there?*

DAVIS: Six years. They took something out of my performance rating, I was a civil servant, because they were going through... You were talking earlier about your husband's performance evaluations including you. But I remember them publishing excerpts from women FSOs evaluations, or else their husbands'. It's been a few years. I don't want to slander anybody, but they had comments in them like, "she's a good worker despite her equine features". I mean really awful, awful things.

*Q: These were things that had been taken out of efficiency reports then, comments about women. Oh, I wonder where those are. I would love to have that for our files.*

DAVIS: I'm sure there must be somebody at State who would still....

*Q: Now was that an article that someone wrote, or what was it?*

DAVIS: I don't remember whether they were articles or handouts, but I think they were true. In fact in my performance evaluation, and I didn't realize this at the time, my boss had put something down about 1972 was a wonderful year for Miss Davis, she did this report and that report and she got married. And it didn't make it into the review stage. I don't think I said anything about it. I think I was so stunned to see it there that I didn't say anything about it, but it didn't make it into the final version several levels up.

*Q: He probably thought better of putting it in.*

DAVIS: Another female boss I think may have thought better of it.

*Q: Did you meet your husband at State?*

DAVIS: No. We had worked together at the Census Bureau before I went to State. He was at the Census Bureau and then he got a job, he was also a writer, with the foreign agriculture magazine , and then he got into the Foreign Agricultural Service as a civil servant.

*Q: And did you leave State shortly after you were married or did you stay on for a while?*

DAVIS: I stayed four years.

*Q: Four years after. Oh, so you really were settled. You were settled in a career and then you suddenly were...*

DAVIS: Well, it was my choice. I didn't have to go.

*Q: You didn't have to go even then you could have stayed.*

DAVIS: I know, but Rome, who could turn it down?

*Q: And what would it have been like to stay at home? Now we're going back twelve years, aren't we. To be a single, but you wouldn't be a single though. You would have been neither fish nor fowl. I think people do it now, because women's careers are perhaps more high-powered, would you say? Why are women doing it more? They just do it more. It's accepted.*

DAVIS: More accepted. Make more money. Maybe they're identifying themselves with their careers in the same way that men have traditionally done.

*Q: So you just picked up and went to Rome with pleasure.*

DAVIS: Yes, I mean actually I'd go now. I wouldn't mind leaving my job.

*Q: What are you doing now?*

DAVIS: I'm working for the General Services Administration [GSA] as a public affairs specialist and I do the employee newsletter and they give me the job of coordinating the visits from foreign visitors, international visitors. Probably because nobody else wants to do it. And I enjoy it.

*Q: I think it sounds like a fun job.*

DAVIS: It is a fun job. And whatever duties, whatever comes along.

*Q: And how long have you been doing that?*

DAVIS: This particular job about a year and before that I worked for the naval audit service for almost a year and a half, editing audit reports, which sounds deadly dull, but actually I found to be stimulating, very interesting, very analytical. It was something I hadn't done before and I didn't know anything about auditors. I taught classes in audit report writing which for somebody who had never even read one before [laughter]... But auditors seem to use a different part of their brains than writers do and so I think it's very difficult for them to take everything that they've found and put it into some sort of coherent package because they're so sick of it by the time they get to write the final report that they leave out logical steps and they forget where they're going. They forget what's relevant and what's not.

*Q: You sound to me like you're very efficient, very creative, very outgoing and I think you must have fit in and had a wonderful time when you were in Rome.*

DAVIS: I did. In fact this summer I went to Yugoslavia with a friend and coincidentally some neighbors from the building that I lived in, some Italians, were also going to be in Yugoslavia. I think most of Italy was in Yugoslavia this summer. So we met up and their daughters had been here the week before and they stayed with me for about a week. They were travelling through Washington. So, we still keep in touch. I can speak some Italian. I really liked it.

*Q: You have a seven year old you said? Who was born in Rome?*

DAVIS: No, in Washington, when we carne back. We carne back in '79 and he was born in '81.

*Q: Did you work after he was born?*

DAVIS: I worked part-time. I worked three days a week. He was small so he was usually in a family daycare.

*Q: And that worked out well? And now he's in school.*

DAVIS: Yes, I felt guilty. I work three days and I'm home more or less four days so I felt like I wasn't turning him over to somebody else to raise. You know mothers can feel guilty no matter what they do. Don't you feel that way?

*Q: Well, I didn't have a lot of the options that you had. It was just traditional. There was just no thought of working when we went abroad.*

DAVIS: I know my morn was home all the time when we were kids too and she had

worked for several years before she married and had children. But she said she used to feel guilty because she was doing the laundry instead of playing with us. Or for yelling at us. I just think that a mother's guilt is boundless.

*Q: No, I didn't feel guilty about that because the laundry had to be done and at one point we had the only wringer washer in all of Arlington I think when we lived out there for two years and all the kids used to come in and watch me do laundry because they had never seen clothes go through a wringer before.*

DAVIS: My mother had a wringer when we were kids and she was deathly afraid we were going to put an arm through it.

*Q: My son did put his arm in once, but it was a very inexpensive Sears one and it popped up. Where did you grow up?*

DAVIS: In central West Virginia until I was sixteen. Then my family moved to the Washington area.

*Q: So you were here then. Where did you go to school?*

DAVIS: Suitland High School in Prince George's County. Now it's a little… I always have to say that it was a really good school then because the county's changed a lot.

*Q: And then where did you go to college?*

DAVIS: I went to... I'm the oldest of five and I went to work at the Naval Oceanographic Office and the community colleges were just starting in this area, and in fact Prince George's Community College where I went for the first two years, was in Suitland High School at night so it really wasn't much of a change. I worked full time and then went to school full time and then after two years I quit my job, withdrew my retirement and paid for my next couple of years college at the University of Maryland.

*Q: So you graduated that way. You are very resourceful really, so I can see why you have your life back together again.*

DAVIS: Thank you. You're seeing me on a good day.

*Q: But, then how did you go about doing that. Was it just a question of going back to work and getting settled? Obviously there were a lot of emotional things to work out.*

DAVIS: I was working part-time.

*Q: I think that would help.*

DAVIS: Yes. when marriages are falling apart, I think both people probably retreat into their jobs.

*Q: It probably gives them something to retreat into, doesn't it? Do you think you did that?*

DAVIS: It's funny. I came across, because I'm back in essentially the same agency I was before, they recruited me back, but I work in a different section, but they were doing a computer clean-up and they hadn't cleaned up my files from a year and a half ago. When they did the clean-up, they dumped my old Fleck files into the Davis files, so I started looking through them and I thought, "My god! These are lucid and I thought I was a basket case". I guess to answer your question, I must have been retreating into my work.

*Q: But do you attribute the break-up of your marriage to the Foreign Service, not to the Foreign Service or to being abroad or just a combination of factors? Something that would have happened'.' I guess what I'm looking for is if there is any foreign service correlation. Because so often there is.*

DAVIS: No, I'm not sure there is. Lloyd was offered a post, he had heard that he was going to be offered Bern as a next post, which would have been okay except the climates not so nice after Rome. We figured that we would have difficulty communicating in three languages instead of one. I was pushing to come back.

*Q: This was from Rome? Oh, he could have gone right from Rome to Bern?*

DAVIS: Right, but I wanted to come back and start a family. I felt our parents were getting older and I thought that we should come back for a while and then go overseas, because he wasn't in the Foreign Service he didn't have this pressure to be overseas fifty-percent of the time. It wasn't a big source of contention between us at all. So, he came back and his career did marvelously in the few years that we were back here. So it was very good for him career-wise. But I think perhaps, that he sort of resented the fact that he came back for essentially my career and then I got pregnant and only worked part-time and so my career didn't go anywhere. That may have been part of the problem.

*Q: It may have well. And then has he gone abroad again?*

DAVIS: Yes, the day he left is the day the separation began.

*Q: So he's back on track as far as his career.'.*

DAVIS: Yes, I think he said, I'm sure he'd love to see this in print, that it was like being retired. That he didn't have all the political pressures of being in Washington and all the turf battles and everything. He was going out as a counselor and he would be his own boss, he'd have a small staff to work for him, and he could do what he wanted. And that's very attractive.

*Q: Where did he go?*

DAVIS: Caracas, Venezuela. He figured he had to stay out ten years out of the next

twenty and he could retire and that's what he wanted to do. Actually it's a pretty nice option. He's lucky to have it.

*Q: Does your son go out to him part of the time?*

DAVIS: No, well, he spent a month with him this summer. He seemed to have had a very good time and he' seemed happy to be back too. It's really kind of a neat thing for him.

*Q: He'll be, who knows, going where, but it did work out. That's nice. I'd like to focus on what you did that first year in Rome and how after being a career person how was it to go over and be offered a job as a typist or something like that and have to take those rather mundane support jobs and have to work your way up when you had already been up. Did that bother you at all?*

DAVIS: It did somewhat. I mean some days I really resented it. Especially, I thought the day after I got my first professional job, I'd never have to rely in my fingers again. And typing I've found, is something, some days you're good at and some days you are not. It doesn't matter how hard you try, there's nothing you can do. I found the subject matter interesting and the people were interesting, so I would do it again. I think I'm much more aggressive and, also I think, the FS is probably much more receptive to... You're rolling your eyes.

*Q: Only if you go to Moscow or and eastern... they have a program, I guess what you were hired under, the AFM, American Family Member, did they have that in the seventies. Maybe they called it something else. They have expanded that program, but you have to be in an eastern European country where they can't get anybody from the local economy to fill the position. There are a few women who are moving into career potential jobs.*

DAVIS: All strictly contract, weekly or whatever?

*Q: Now they have PIT [Part-time, Intermittent, and Temporary]. Did they have PIT jobs then?*

DAVIS: I think they did. Actually, I did have one appointment with USIA and that was because the executive secretary was going on home leave and they gave me a one month, six week appointment, and I had to be sworn in and go through the security check and the whole thing. I mention that because it became very important to me later because I had accumulated a lot of sick leave before I went to Rome, and if you have more than a three year break in service you lose all your sick leave, but because I had had that one month of service right in the middle of this four year gap, they restored my sick leave and I was able to take six months of paid maternity leave. That was great. There was definite advantages.

*Q: That first year, did you do, was there a women's club and did you do all that sort of thing?*

DAVIS: That had sort of died out. When I first got there, the ambassador was Volpe, the builder from Massachusetts and she was very grandmotherly. First I got invited, first I had cards and I even resented having cards, but I had them, so I passed them around, Mrs. Lloyd Fleck.

*Q: But did you have your own business cards? You hadn't brought any with you?*

DAVIS: No, I didn't, but I threatened to have some printed for him that read, "Mr. Mary Kay Fleck", but I never did. But, she was very grandmotherly and the tea we went to was really just a formality for her too. You could tell she'd rather be knitting a sweater for her grandchildren than doing this. The next ambassador was really into, was Gardiner and his wife was Italian, had been Italian-born and she was from a weal thy family in Venice. I don't remember whether it was a noble family or not.

*Q: Was he career?*

DAVIS: No, he was, I want to say political. Yes, he was political. I'm trying to think of his first name, but there's somebody I work with now named Gardiner who keeps interfering. He was a professor of, I think, international law at Columbia. He was very, I think the Italians were very happy to have somebody who was so well educated. I think Volpe was Italian born, but he had what they considered a kind of a hick accent in Italian, very class conscious. I think the Italians were really happy to have this new ambassador. His wife liked to wear American designer fashions and bring American art. She was very involved in that and she didn't have time for the wives. So, there really wasn't, and my husband's position lowly enough and being in Agriculture, nobody really

[tape interruption]

*Q: ...and your attitude that the women really hadn't earned their role.*

DAVIS: That's really insensitive.

*Q: No, but there are hundreds, if not thousands of women of my generation who would never… But you see that's a sign of the times. Your generation is used to doing it on your own as far as your careers are concerned. So where are you now vis-a-vis the thought of marrying again?*

DAVIS: Pretty remote.

*Q: Is it remote? I mean that must be self- imposed. Is it?*

DAVIS: Well, I guess... The divorce is fairly recent. Having been through a divorce, and knowing what a struggle it is, and having to sort out the finances, do all these things. And now that I feel I can actually support myself and my son, I don't know if I'd want to get tied up again. Plus I'm getting older and I'm not used to having anyone around. And I'm not sure I'd want to make those sorts of compromises that you have to make to live with

somebody else. I mean a seven year old I can still sort of boss around and nobody second guesses me on what the child should be doing either. Although that was never a problem in the marriage. You have to do a lot of things to live with another person.

*Q: How much of this stems from being the oldest of five and taking control of your four younger siblings?*

DAVIS: Well I tried, but I was never very successful. The unwillingness to compromise or the wanting to be in control or both I guess.

*Q: They say where you are in your family determines your personality.*

DAVIS: I think it does to a large extent. Flora [Pitts] told me the birth order theory, using the birth order theory, I should have had a terrific marriage. It doesn't always work.

*Q: And maybe there's another factor there. I mean you're only fifty percent of that. So maybe the other fifty percent wasn't working in the birth order.*

DAVIS: Maybe that was it because he was the youngest and I was the oldest.

*Q: That's what Guido and I are.*

DAVIS: And you've been married for thirty years.

*Q: Oh, more than that. It's getting on to almost forty now. Staggering. But I see in my daughter's marriage that her husband is very dynamic, very career oriented. And Ruthie is quite content, she's a graphic designer, she's quite content to work at a low key job. I think it's a good thing because if they were both high-powered attorneys like he is, I don't quite see how it would work. Although some people do make it work.*

DAVIS: I don't know obviously what does make it work. Sometimes opposites and sometimes similarities of interests. But I've heard people say it is the commitment to the institution of marriage that makes it work.

*Q: I don't know I've never consciously gone one through life with a commitment. Did you?*

DAVIS: I think I was pretty committed.

*Q: I never thought of it in those terms.*

DAVIS: I read some statistics not long ago that couples that live together before marriage have a higher divorce rate than other couples.

*Q: If you had asked me I would have said that it was the exact opposite. And why is it?*

DAVIS: Because they aren't as committed to the institution. Because they lived together without being married, it obviously doesn't mean that much to them. I thought that was fascinating. I would have said the same thing as you.

*Q: I would think you would know what you were getting into.*

[Tape interruption]

DAVIS: You had asked about some of the experiences of living in Rome and the Moro killing and the Red Brigade. I remember when Moro was kidnapped, and I guess when they found his body and for some reason, I don't know if it was March, but I seem to recall it was that time of year when they found his body. It was also the time of the Verona agricultural fair, so we had gone to Verona. One of the most striking visual images I have of Italy was just about dusk and the beautiful Roman coliseum there. It was filled, there was a big demonstration going on with Communist party flags and Christian Democrat flags and any other of the myriad Italian party flags all together in one place. They were far enough away that I couldn't hear what they were saying, but it was sort of a show of solidarity. I think it was a similar experience for the Italians to the assassination of John Kennedy in that it sort of hit them with that same brutality that they'd kidnapped a man, because he was a very important political figure for a number of years.

And I had mentioned to you also that I was at home one day and heard gunshots, automatic rifles I guess it was. Machine gun fire. It was very close and there was the party headquarters around the corner. Living in Rome at that time you heard a lot of bombs going off, and just sort of, oh, yeah, there's another bomb going off and wondering which headquarters it was. But feeling all the time very safe walking through the streets because there was very little violent crime in Italy. And knowing that my husband was so low ranking that we wouldn't be a target anyway. But that afternoon it was frightening. Apparently what had happened was the Red Brigades had gone into the party headquarters, evacuated everybody, which they always did very nicely, and then set off a few bombs. And then as they were coming out some plainclothes policemen just happened to come around the corner, I think they were in a marked car, and the Red Brigades thought somebody had called the police and they had come, and they just shot them as they got out of the car. That sort of violence was practically unheard of. About three of them were killed and they were saying, "these kids'', they were only about twenty-five years old, "these kids didn't realize when they got out of the car what was going to happen".

The Italians were very, very upset about it. Of course they cordoned off the area and there were helicopters. My Italian neighbor from down the street came up, we were hanging out over the terrace trying to, in typical Italian fashion, trying to see what was going on. And then I realized that they were probably looking for snipers at the same time, so we went back inside and we each called our husbands and told them not to come home for lunch and that we were fine, not to worry.

You know how they have these sort of rolling blinds that come down and cover...and it

was really startling to out and see the bullet holes that had gone right through the metal. They had killed those people there. It was a very bad time for Italy.

*Q: This was your first first-hand encounter with violence of that'..?*

DAVIS: Yes, we had had a party shortly after we first got there and we had invited, as I recall, two other American couples from the embassy. They were coming and there was a demonstration that night and they were walking. As I said the apartment was right on the Tiber, that was a major avenue for marches, and people came marching through carrying Molotov cocktails and writing graffiti, which happened every day anyway. Our friends, actually one [couple] ended up walking because they didn't live very far away and they didn't have any problem, but the other ones had gotten tied up in the tail-end of the demonstration. We didn't know where they were. We knew they weren't home, so we kept calling the embassy and they would patch through to wherever they were. That was our first introduction to violence. I didn't really feel threatened by that personally. But if you knew that other friends had been out and there had been a demonstration that had turned somewhat violent, that if there was a large congregation of people you just didn't stay around because you could get caught up in it, and pressed against a wall. Just common sense sorts of things.

The other historical event I was thinking of as we left was, you know in English we say, "once in a blue moon'', and in Italy they say "once every death of a pope". And while we were there two popes died, Paul V and John Paul I. The first one was Italian, and the second was Italian and then you know the Polish pope came in. Of course the Italians have a millennia of conspiracies, many of them still believe it was an assassination. Which in fact may have happened. One interesting tidbit, for cocktail trivia, when the first pope died, they leave them in state for a long time in St. Peter's, and he had started to decompose. So when the second pope died they had learned from experience quickly, and they called in an embalmer from the U.S. Navy in Naples. I think he was lying in state longer than he was pope. Anyway that was a small U.S. contribution to the death of the pope.

There were just tons of dignitaries coming through at that time and it was very interesting. Lloyd said he was buying [religious] medals by the pound for all the congressmen to take back, to have them blessed to take back to their constituents.

*Q: Lord, I would never have thought of that, to hand out a medal that had been blessed by the pope. Do you bless them by the box or gross.*

DAVIS: Well, I think they just used to take them out. It didn't matter where he was.

*Q: Oh, it was just a general blessing, nobody is ever really aware.*

DAVIS: Nobody ever really knew.

*Q: I'm being sacrilegious, I guess.*

DAVIS: You would have done well in Rome, I think. Somebody said that the closer you are to the center of power, like in Washington, its full of cynics. Rome is full of cynics and people trying to get messages to the pope. That was another big consular duty. You would have these people who were coming with messages for the pope.

Another thing that I did that was sort of unusual, I became friends with the portiere's daughter, the concierge's daughter. She was a university student and she'd met, interestingly, some of her cousins and they were getting married. They invited me to the wedding in the village that the bride was from. This was in the 1970's, so obviously it wasn't very rustic, but they did it in sort of the old rustic way. They very nicely took me to the town and I stayed with the bride the whole morning. They explained as she got dressed, and then all the villagers came to pick her up and walked her to the church, and then they had the wedding. Then the whole village walked down to the piazza and in the piazza was a vintage car waiting. Then we went back to Rome for the reception in a fifteenth century palazzo, which is much more typical. That was just a very pleasant little interlude that not very many people get to do.

*Q: Did your husband have the same interest in the, oh, of course he was in the office a lot more, but the same interest in mingling with the...*

DAVIS: I think I'm probably more of an extrovert than he is, although I didn't know it at the time. I made most of the contacts with the Italians, but he always enjoyed them and his Italian was quite good too. It was something we really enjoyed. Travelling and living and going to museums.

*Q: And restaurants?*

DAVIS: And restaurants, yes.

*Q: I'm trying to think when I was in Rome last. It's been years, probably not since 1962. As you say when it's a thousand years old, what difference does twenty-six years make.*

DAVIS: But there's a MacDonald's now I understand.

*Q: Did you live right downtown?*

DAVIS: Yes, right on the river, not far from the Via Condotti where the very rich shop. It was wonderful.

*Q: That must have been nice, not to be tucked out in the suburbs somewhere.*

DAVIS: And there was the market. Everybody there was Italian. There weren't any other Americans in that locale. So, I had to learn to speak Italian.

*Q: And go out with your little basket?*

DAVIS: They had the white plastic bags, that we have now. They were everywhere. I used to go out in jeans, but then I realized that nobody did that. We noticed a definite correlation between the way we were dressed and the way we were treated. We didn't wear jeans travelling around, or if we did, my husband would wear a sportscoat with it. Because when we didn't, we had a Volkswagen van and people always thought we were members of, he's blond and has a beard, people thought we were members of the Baader-Meinhof gang. So we tried to dress like diplomats.

*Q: My son used to dress when he came down to Curacao, because he had to go through customs in Puerto Rico, and he found that if he had on a sports jacket and a tie, that he got through customs much more easily than if he had on jeans and a blue shirt or something. Because in those days, now too, they were searching them for drugs. Well, the other thing was the Italians couldn't categorize you once you spoke, because your Italian was obviously a second language. The only gauge they had was the way you looked.*

DAVIS: But, I mean my accent was never, I was rarely ever taken for an Italian.

*Q: Well, that's it. They didn't know how to categorize you because of your language. The jeans were maybe a symbol.*

DAVIS: I guess it was more that young people wore them, younger than I was, teenagers. And women didn't wear them when they went shopping. I wore slacks. It was cold in the winter, very damp. Without jeans, I just got better treatment.

*Q: I forget. I never really marketed there, in Rome. Did you bargain there?*

DAVIS: At the flea markets, but everywhere else was pretty much, but if you knew the vendors they'd throw in a little extra or throw in a free sample. They were always telling me, "oh, these cherries are the best because they're from Ravenna". And you know there really were differences in taste depending on the soil of where the cherries were grown or where the basil. The best basil was supposed to be from Genoa. My language teacher would bring back suitcases of basil. She said it was different. And the artichokes looked different depending on where they were from. And each little town had its own olives and its own cheese. It was a wonderful place to put on weight.

*Q: But being there to visit relatives, and to get right into the, because of course, Guido's family, his father was from Italy. He's a Florentine. And to be taken right into homes.*

DAVIS: Yes, that's a wonderful thing.

*Q: I remember being impressed that his cousin had a government job, but he wasn't a diplomat or anything, but he had a full-time live-in maid which I thought was marvelous.*

DAVIS: People had a lot of maids. But, they hung their clothes out. I couldn't understand that. On lines. They didn't have dryers because they said they were too expensive, but

they had maids who hung clothes out on the line.

*Q: I guess it was cheaper to have a maid than a dryer. There was never that one big outlay at once. With a maid it was just a little at a time. So in Italy servants are still readily available?*

DAVIS: I don't think so much anymore. I think people are having a harder time getting servants. We had one but we had a Philippine, sort of a Philippine connection among the embassy people. They had a lot of Philippine women in Rome who worked for American embassy people.

*Q: How in the world did the Philippines get to Italy?*

DAVIS: I don't know. And they were women. Some were married to Philippines in the U.S. Navy, but how they got to Rome I don't know. And the one we had had left her children down, but that's fairly common I gather. But she just came four hours on Saturdays, but it was terrific.

*Q: But, that's fascinating, that those were the women whose husbands are always stewards on board ship, or the cook. And they somehow. They had special passports or something.*

DAVIS: I don't know. I don't think so. I mean they weren't fully attached to the embassy. I mean I'm sure they had the goods on everybody in the embassy community. They would have been a real useful tool for somebody.

*Q: You know I would just love, somehow with this project, to interview someone who had worked as a servant in an embassy. There is a woman here in Washington and I don't know if she'll talk to me because she now works for Michael Deaver.*

[Tape interruption]

*Q: There is a practice of giving divorced wives'…*

DAVIS: Well, there were some at State when I was there. Because they come in at relatively high level and that was, people would joke that that was part of the divorce settlement that they would get a job at the Department.

*Q: Are they still doing that?*

DAVIS: I don't know. One of the FSOs that was killed by terrorists, in Mexico I think, his widow was also given a job at State, but I thought that was just an example of the State Department taking care of its own. Or I guess you could take the more cynical view, the old-boy-network. Helping the old-boys-network dump old wives. Get them self-supporting so they wouldn't have to pay so much alimony.

But when you were talking about the Service, there were a couple of guys actually who worked in the snack bar, or maybe owned the snack bar in the embassy in Rome, who also catered. So they would be in people's houses serving, but that wasn't quite the extreme that you were talking about as of a servant being invited as a guest. Because everybody just joked around with them. I mean they were there all the time, so they were sort of friends and sort of servants. Not the most respectful service that you would want, but it was fine.

*Q: I wonder if that isn't maybe just the trend, that we as Americans set the way.*

[Tape interruption]

DAVIS: ...abroad. And seeing America from abroad. It's such a powerful country. We have so much freedom, and I don't think Americans realize this. And the other thing, on coming back, we don't hear anything about what's going on back there. The news coverage is so sketchy. It's only disasters that we hear about. And that's really sad and that leads to the isolation.

*Q: I think you have some wonderful insights there, in your three years.*

[Tape interruption]

DAVIS: I was saying how insensitive I was..

*Q: Oh, I wouldn't consider that insensitivity at all. That's just lack of interest, lack of awareness, because it affected you more than you realize, but since you haven't known what has gone on before, it couldn't have made too much difference to your life. It just enabled you to go ahead and lead the life ..*

DAVIS: That I wanted.

*Q: Somewhat. To enable you to lead the life better. Did any of the putting your life back together have to do with re-entry back to Washington? And, as you say, getting back to who you were? And going to Hechinger's on Saturday, was any of getting your life back together part of that? Or was that an easy transition, re-entry?*

DAVIS: I'm not sure what you mean by getting my life back together?

*Q: Well, when you came back, a lot of people have what you call re-entry, yes, reverse culture shock really. You get back here and no, the mail doesn't come on time every day, and no, the paper isn't always there, and no, you have to wait four hours for the plumber, and things like that. Now was that any...*

DAVIS: Seems pretty much the same. They collected the trash every day in Rome which was very nice.

*Q: So really no re-entry...*

DAVIS: Well, it was kind of a shock because suddenly you could understand everything. And you were just bombarded with commercials and everything seemed faster. I could understand everything that was going on in Italy, but I could also tune it out a little bit better. But here, all my senses felt assaulted by commercialism, I think.

Also the twang, and how nasal American voices are. People would make that comment to me in Europe and I would think, "Americans aren't nasal when they talk". Fairfax County accent sounded so southern to me. It was pretty depressing coming back. You couldn't get really good fresh pasta and the fruits and vegetables weren't really good. You had to do everything yourself. You couldn't just call the embassy and have them deliver something. I couldn't walk out to my little fish market. Shopping every day just wasn't fun at the Giant [supermarket], so I didn't do it.

*Q: That's certainly true. I couldn't get used to buying meat all wrapped up in plastic. I felt like I was being deprived because I couldn't look at it and maybe poke it.*

DAVIS: And the fish, you couldn't walk down and have them slice off a swordfish steak for you. And the architecture was sort of boring. It was only a hundred years old or two-hundred years old as opposed to a thousand. And we had had a lovely apartment overlooking the Tiber and we could see several bridges from it. You know it was just right downtown so the walk home from the embassy was wonderful. Annandale just doesn't cut it.

*Q: And where are you living now?*

DAVIS: I live in Arlington. Arlington still isn't Rome.

*Q: Where in Arlington?*

DAVIS: In a section called Maywood, near Cherrydale, between Lee Highway and Lorcom Lane. A turn of the century neighborhood. My Italian friends loved it when they came to visit because I have one of those big front porches and porch swings.

*Q: When did you buy that house?*

DAVIS: A year ago.

*Q: So you've bought that since you've been on your own. Well, good for you.*

DAVIS: It only has two closets and two doors in the whole house, but I don't accumulate.

*Q: What year is it?*

DAVIS: 1915. And I think they took out one of the closets to put in a bathroom, so I guess if I have a choice between an indoor bathroom and a closet, I'll take the bathroom. My son came back from Venezuela this summer saying, "Mom, Dad has five bedrooms and five bathrooms! Let's buy another bathroom." I said maybe someday.

*Q: How does your husband manage him when he's this small and goes off to the office every day in Caracas?*

DAVIS: He has a maid and he has a girlfriend who lives with him.

*Q: I thought maybe he was there alone. That makes a difference. Because I had wondered about that with children coming out to visit a single parent at the embassy. In Brazil we had single mothers who worked all day long. I think that would be hard.*

DAVIS: I think so too. Some people have recommended that I apply for the Foreign Service. Being a single mom is hard enough here in Washington where I feel comfortable, but to pick up and move every couple of years I think would be, with a child would be very hard.

*Q: I would depend upon where... Also you get to the point where the child is eighteen and going off to school or depending on where you are, fourteen, as my son did to go to prep school because there was nothing in English where we were. And then you're there alone and far away.*

DAVIS: But, I think foreign service life, if you want to know a country and live overseas, I mean vacation just isn't the way to do it. You really have no feel for what a country is like. For me it is a lazy intellectual endeavor because it is like opening a book every day. You just walk out and see all these wonderful new things. Except after a while I began to realize how much I didn't know about the culture, even the recent culture. People would talk about rock stars, Italian pop stars of the '50s and I didn't have that cultural memory that comes with living in a place for a real long time. I had a friend in high school, she was a military child and she felt like she had cultural amnesia when she came to the States because she didn't know anything about the '50s or '60s. Anything that any of her contemporaries talked about, she just had no idea. I guess that comes with being in the FS too.

*Q: I'm amazed over and over again at how American my children are. And they really, Ruthie went to first and second grade in the United States and then fourth and fifth and that was all. And Camillo went to first and second grade here and that was it until he got to prep school and she got to college. But yet, we had Beatle records playing all the time. A certain amount of that, well, they went to a Department of Defense school for a while and that wasn't a terribly challenging education and then they went to the American School of Tangiers. It was a multi-national student body, but they had American teachers and American curriculum. I don't know where they pick it up, but as you say, there is some amnesia there.*

DAVIS: I think there's amnesia if *you* live here too.

*Q: You're about my daughter's age. You're ...*

DAVIS: Forty-two.

*Q: Ruthie's thirty-seven, so you're more or less that generation. A baby boomer. I'm interested to your very positive reaction to Rome, and yet it perplexes me that you didn't think you could go and have a baby in Bern. Looking at it from my point of view, I would have just...this is it and go to Bern.*

DAVIS: I guess I wanted to come back for my career too. And touch base, but maybe I knew the marriage was falling apart even way back then. I don't know. But it felt like I needed to'''

*Q: Get back on familiar turf maybe?*

DAVIS: I guess I had very close family ties as well. My sister had a child and I hadn't seen her. There are things going on back in the States too, and I thought it was important for us to go back and buy a house, which my husband had never consented to do before we left. This was '79.

*Q: Right when interest rates went up. But, at least you were lucky that you got it then.*

DAVIS: In fact, the same house we had looked at before we left had gone up thirty thousand dollars in three years.

*Q: I'm surprised it hadn't gone up more. That was the time of real estate escalation.*

DAVIS: But we were able to assume the loan at eight and three quarters or something. We really didn't lose that much when everybody else was getting fourteen, fifteen percent.

*Q: So you were more aware of the need to get into the real estate market than he at that point?*

DAVIS: I had lived in the area longer and I knew what could go on.

*Q: So where did you buy that house?*

DAVIS: In Annandale. Actually I had bought a beach cottage on Chesapeake Bay. That was fun. In fact I still have that.

*Q: When you were here before you were a dual-income family, once you got abroad, you were making something, but it wasn't... Did you have any feelings that your career was slipping away while you were in Rome? While your peers here were moving forward? It's*

*interesting for me to talk to you about this, because none of this touched my own FS life. This is what is coming out of the project, the vast difference. Not only between you and me, but between me and someone who is twenty years older than I am. There is more similarity between the eighty-year-olds that I talk to and my career experience than there is between yours and mine and there's about that much difference between us.*

DAVIS: Working at State, I remember taking, I used to go to FSI [FS Institute] a lot, but I was talking to one of the FSOs on the bus, and he said, I was asking about the FS, and he said it is a lot harder on the wives.

*Q: I'm glad he was aware of it.*

DAVIS: The men go to the office every day. They don't care whether their office is in Ouagadougou or the Antilles or wherever. It's the wives that have to confront the different culture, to buy food, to manage the servants, to enroll the kids in school and keep some semblance of normality. If you interview eighty-year-old FSOs and ninety-year-old FSOs and thirty-year-old FSOs, male, I'm not sure there'd be so much difference.

*Q: That's a very good point and that's one no one has brought up. We've tried to look at every possible angle of this thing and that's something that no one has brought up. Because you're quite right. Guido was in the economic cone and his job in Rabat was not an awful lot different from his job in Sierra-Leone, from his job in Curacao, from his job in Holland.*

DAVIS: And they have the locals there to help with everything. Remember this came from a man.

*Q: The other thing I worry about with the women replacing the locals, if we aren't losing something really.*

DAVIS: I noticed something when we were in Rome that, having had the experience of being civil service in Washington, I think the civil servants in Washington are treated the same way locals are overseas. The same sort of second-class citizen. Well, you're there and you do the work, but what you do isn't really that important. I mean it was never anything that overt in either place, but it was a feeling that I got.

*Q: I don't know anything about the civil service, but I would imagine at State ...*

DAVIS: And I think that what you are saying is right. I think the locals are more irreplaceable than my former colleagues at State won't appreciate it.

*Q: No, but that's been said before.*

DAVIS: The civil servants at State are people who are here all the time, because the skills, here there are a lot of people who have the same sorts of skills in Washington,

whereas overseas there aren't always a lot of locals who can number one, speak English, know how an embassy works, or who have that, what do you call it, corporate knowledge, history.

*Q: Institutional history I think they call it. After your divorce, what role did your job play in getting your life back together? A big one?*

DAVIS: Kept me fed.

*Q: But didn't you get alimony?*

DAVIS: Sure, but it wouldn't be enough to live on. It helped build my self-esteem. I had a terrific boss in my last job, she was just wonderful. I was the first person she ever supervised and she was great. She made me feel appreciated and terrific and built up my self-esteem. That's what every boss should do.

*Q: That's good management.*

DAVIS: I had originally intended to be a teacher because I always had very good English teachers, but I just could never, like that you woman you said could write well but you never could interview because she couldn't speak, I could relate to that. Because I always used to write and that's how I developed a skill in writing and I was always very self-conscious about speaking in public, especially in front of groups.

And suddenly I had this job where I had to teach people something I really didn't know anything about. I did that. She was very good about that. She let me sit in on her many more times than most bosses would have. She let me take many different courses and she was going to get me into a voice projection class, so I could work on protecting my voice. That was a really good experience for me too. To teach and I didn't throw up and I didn't pass out. Each time I did it I actually enjoyed it more and I got lots of feedback from the auditors, positive feedback. That was a real growth experience. That helped a lot.

And then I got another offer for a better job and I really thought about not taking it because I liked working for her so much, but she told me she was looking for a job too. So, it became a race. A man at work was very active in the Fairfax County YMCA Indian Guides program. It's a parent and child program. He wanted to have a mother's program and so he was looking for some sucker to head it up.

We got snowed in at work that Martin Luther King Holiday. No, they had everyone come into work, then they released them immediately. It was a mess. I had difficulty getting in but I was relatively new on the job and I thought if I didn't come in what would they think. I got to work. Came in and they released us and I drove for three hours and only got three miles. And I really had to go to the bathroom. And it was obvious that nobody was getting anywhere and it was craziness. By that time I was at the Marine annex and the Marines were pulling out regardless of how many cars were there and I turned around and drove back to town, back to Crystal City and drove in to a snow bank to get my car

off the road. And took the Metro. The Metro didn't go anywhere. I just walked and got a motel room. I had been stranded one other time in Washington and I knew that we were so close to National Airport it would fill up fast.

I didn't have a key to my office, so I walked around Crystal City to get something to eat and I ran into some people and they had keys, so we went back there and went out to dinner. So he was telling me about this program so I decided to do it.

The program started about a year ago and they got me involved in more public speaking, organizing. It's really a wonderful program. It's probably about seventy-five percent single moms doing it with their kids. It's a really nice program. My son and I really enjoy it and it is nice to see, you probably feel the same satisfaction with this project, that's if you weren't doing it, it wouldn't be here. Although your project is much bigger than mine right now, I know that a lot of people have enjoyed the last year because I agreed to do it. They put a lot into it too.

*Q: What exactly do you do with it?*

DAVIS: It's built around an American Indian theme and we wear feathers and headbands and the children earn bear claws. It's similar to scouts and their merit badges. They get badges if they go someplace, to a Caps game, or certain activities. We kind of tag along with the dads, except for the camping, which is fine. I mean, I don't care. That seems to be a real controversial subject. They're saying that some of the wives don't like it. I think some of the dads don't like it. Somebody said, "well, that's what they used for the military, not letting the women in the military." Sweetheart that went out with somebody too old for the program. And we do, like we went to Colvin Run Mill one Saturday and pulled taffy and made Christmas decorations. We camp out in tents and have a campout in the Spring. The only thing, unlike scouting, you have to be there with your child. You don't drop them off at a meeting. You do crafts and you have a little snack. It's a nice time that you set aside to be with your child. Since I'm a big chief, I get a big headdress. John thinks it is really wonderful that we're the boss of all the Indians.

*Q: Great. I do have to ask you, because you do seem to have everything so all together, do you, you must still be going to Flora, well, yes.*

DAVIS: Yes, actually I'm thinking about dropping out. Don't call Flora.

*Q: No, I won't. Of course I won't tell her.*

DAVIS: No, I told Flora that I'm thinking of dropping out. But, I think I might do it soon.

*Q: Did she agree that you were certainly ready for it, dropping out?*

DAVIS: She didn't really say. I just said I was thinking of dropping out, but then I always felt that I needed this extra lifeline in case things went terrible.

*Q: How often do you see her?*

DAVIS: I haven't seen her since the beginning of August [six weeks ago], but it meets once a week. She was off, then she came back and I went on vacation for two weeks and then I had signed Parents Without Partners. When I joined up I didn't realize that the discussion group was the same night, so I went three nights to that and then we had Indian recruitment. But next week I'm planning to go.

*Q: Is it a group of divorced women and Flora facilitates the discussion or how does it work?*

DAVIS: Yes, it started out and in three years' time a lot of women have been through there, but I've outlasted at least one facilitator and a lot of women. It started out being divorced women, now its [ ] singles, so there are a number of women there who have not been married and nobody else has children. I'm feeling that this is really not the group for me anymore.

*Q: You're ready to move on to something else.*

DAVIS: A lot of the members have joined since I, in the time that I've been away. Actually I'm getting tired of telling my story, divorce story. When people change, it changes the focus of the group, the interaction of the different members. Since I've been out of it for a while, it's probably formed sort of a group and it would be, if I go in and be active in it, it will change things and I'm not sure if I would benefit, or that they would.

*Q: You might be helping them since they're new. You become almost like one of the facilitators. I found when I took a Gestalt course in Curacao, the first once or twice I thought it was really great, and then I began second guessing the instructor, and I usually could second guess, and I found that it was annoying him and was beginning to bore me. I had a friend who was absolutely hooked on them. They invited us to go because they were management things for Shell and the banks and they were all men. The psychologist found that he needed some women, so he invited us to come and be women in the group to liven it up a little. I did go to two.*

DAVIS: You livened it up too much.

*Q: No. it wasn't that so much, it was just that I found out how disgustingly normal.*

DAVIS: I guess I don't know enough theory to...

*Q: It must be the same as your group with Flora, to build up and acceptance of you. There was a great deal of that in the group. I felt that the psychologist, I'm sure Flora is very good at this too, finding out where the person needs to be strengthened. He was very good at that. I would think Flora is good at that too.*

DAVIS: So, it wasn't a lecture.

*Q: No, it was group participation and playing games. We would all lie on the floor in a circle and hold hands and we somehow determined how much space we needed. We closed our eyes, keep our eyes closed and we determined how much space we needed by the way we held our hands out like this or like this. And that thing where you build up such supreme confidence that you just fall backwards without looking and you know someone is going to catch you. That sort of thing, that really gut-level personal acceptance. You must be doing that in this, or don't you?*

DAVIS: No, it is just talking.

*Q: Just talking. Just having a sounding board.*

DAVIS: There is no facilitator, it is much more. I was getting frustrated because I would/could say anything and no one would challenge me. Flora's much more challenging, and I think that's really good.

*Q: You mean she'll ask you why you felt that way.*

DAVIS: Why I felt that way, or, well, she's never vulgar, but are you sure that's really what you mean? Not exactly second guessing.

*Q: That's to make you the be more introspective or to see if you really do feel that way, or if this is just anger that you're getting out?*

DAVIS: Yes, I guess sort of a sounding board, to be more introspective or to realize patterns that we use.

*Q: Or was it a case also of finding there were other people in the same situation?*

DAVIS: Initially it was that, knowing that there were other people going through the same anguish.

*Q: Did you initiate your divorce or did your husband?*

DAVIS: I guess it was mutual, by the time he left, but initially it was his idea. That was very difficult for me to accept.

*Q: But by the time he left it was mutual. Because you did mention something earlier about self-esteem and I've always wondered if the person who initiates has the loss of self-esteem too. Because it didn't work.*

DAVIS: I'm sure there's always a sense of failure in a divorce, whether you initiate it or not.

*Q: I've seen two friends who were just euphoric after they had made the decision. Finally*

*it was over. And then both just hit bottom, both in different ways. One made a spectacular recovery. I don't know how the other one has done. The other one would not go for help.*

DAVIS: I think once the separation is made, my friends have told me this, once he's out of there, you're going to feel a lot better. There's a tremendous sense of relief, of release, I think. That you've made a decision and now you know how things are and what you're going to have to do.

*Q: All of which doesn't really relate to your FS experience. I keep coming back to that. You don't fit into my pattern.*

DAVIS: I told you you might not want to talk to me.

*Q: No, you really have said some very, very revealing things.*

DAVIS: I hope not too revealing.

*Q: No, no. I didn't mean personally revealing. I mean about your generation and the attitude of the women of your generation toward the Service.*

DAVIS: I think, maybe, Now that you say that I'm feeling really bad, because for me it just seemed like, "well, these poor women had just been kept down all these years".

*Q: We had been. Did you ever discuss that with your peers or was that just an assumption between your age group that yes, these women had, and even some of the senior wives, even then were doing an awful lot I'm sure in representation. And getting absolutely no recognition or anything from it. What was your reaction to them? Did you think they were foolish?*

DAVIS: I guess probably foolish. Some people really become full of themselves in the FS. I don't know if I can speak for my whole generation. I can just speak for myself, it is embarrassing, I sound so self-righteous maybe. Now I forget what I was going to say.

*Q: That you were speaking for yourself and not perhaps for your whole generation about the women who become quite full of themselves.*

DAVIS: Maybe they got their just deserts. It's about time they started living on their own merits instead of their husbands'.

*Q: I was going to ask you, that they hadn't gotten to that position on their own.*

DAVIS: But I think part of that was being young and rejecting part of my parents' values. I think there was that in the late '60s, early '70s too. I guess what I hadn't realized was how much men profited from their wives.

*Q: Expand on that.*

DAVIS: Well, they did. All men do, I think. When I was in Rome there was another couple, I think they were about our age, and it was also their first post. She has since come back and gotten a PhD. He's left the FS; she's come back and gotten a PhD in public health, I think and they moved out of the area. She was very into her career and she worked full time. She was fortunate enough to get a job full-time with the FAO. So they couldn't entertain. She wasn't willing to do all the cooking. I guess he did some, but that was sort of frowned upon. People thought they were sort of weird, you could tell. I think there was something in his performance appraisal about his wife didn't contribute anything.

*Q: It's not supposed to be.*

DAVIS: It may have been taken out in the review process, but I remember she was very angry about that. There was something that he didn't entertain much because of his home situation. In such a way that it was really hard to...

*Q: They didn't really mention her, but...*

DAVIS: And the other thing, for bachelors, and for unmarried women FSOs, they had the same problems as those with working spouses. That was somewhat unfair. When I was in Rome there was a lot of discussion, in fact, I think one night some of the wives got together, and they were talking about, they may have had more than one meeting, about should wives be compensated for what they did. Some wives were saying they thought, and these were rather high-ranking FSOs wives, that they should get fifty percent of their husbands' salary. And I'm like, "hey! You already get one hundred percent of it. Why do you want fifty percent?"

*Q: Weren't they asking for an additional fifty percent?*

DAVIS: No, sometimes they were asking for maybe twenty percent more. Then they were saying maybe half of their husband's checks should come in their name and I thought, no, that ought to be separate. And then they wanted a percentage of their husband's salary as compensation. My feeling was, your husband makes a lot more money if, because it didn't always necessarily correlate that the wives of the men making enough money did the most entertaining. There were other lower-ranking officers wives who did a lot more work. It just seemed to me a continuation of this sort of classism in the FS. The higher ranking your husband was, the more valuable your time was, and the time you expended didn't seem democratic, didn't seem American.

*Q: I wonder if those meetings were in response to Marlene Eagleburger, made a spouse compensation proposal, which almost made in the Congress.*

DAVIS: This was before that.

*Q: That would have been about 1980. No, it would have been later than that. So it was*

*before that. It must have been the Forum report. There was a Forum meeting in 1976, which eventually led to the establishment of the FLO office. They sent questionnaires all over the world when they were looking for backing to prove they needed a family liaison office, and maybe that was it. Or maybe they just got together as a group.*

DAVIS: I got the impression, although it was the home of one of the counselors, but I didn't get the impression that it was an official thing. We didn't have to sneak in or out or anything either. It was open as I understood it to anybody to come. I didn't get the impression that it was something that was mandated by the Department.

*Q: Your assessment of the women is very interesting to me, because they had, the older ones, led a life that had forced them into an adjunct role. That's the way the Service was. They had no other identity. When the '72 Directive took it away from them, that created a great void for many of them.*

DAVIS: It must have caused a great loss of self-esteem on a grand scale. Not feeling valued.

*Q: A lot of them paid their dues and then when it was their turn to do DCM...*

DAVIS: Their turn to have people come to scrub toilet seats for the party.

*Q: No one would do it and some of them were very bitter about it.*

DAVIS: I was relieved no one expected me to do that because I didn't have to take a stand. But I did hear some terrible stories about ambassadors' wives.

*Q: The abuses. Well, unfortunately there were. I was very lucky. I'd always find a potted palm to hide behind. And we were basically in small posts too. Perhaps there was not as much frenetic, women would get very uptight about their teas or their cocktail parties, or whatever. Even after years of experience of giving them.*

DAVIS: Maybe there was a lot of underlying resentment too. If you knew that you were being evaluated all the time, or your husband was being evaluated.

*Q: I didn't mind being evaluated. Now maybe that was because I always got good reports. Maybe if you didn't you'd feel quite differently about it. And I wasn't a compliant wife, by any means. I would always speak up, even as a young, first tour officer's wife, if I thought I was being mis-treated, I would let people know. I decided very early on, if I don't, my whole life will be a put-down. How much of the women's attitude depends on their relationship with their husband. That we'll never know. Unless they tell us, and they may not always be proud of that relationship or happy with it.*

*I think the counterpoint became the attitudes of your generation and the attitudes of mine. I realize now are going to make the project even more interesting than I thought. And more valuable. The only other person I've talked to of your generation that I've talked to*

*is a tandem spouse and she knows right where she's going. She's really the most level-headed, not that you don't know where you're going, but Patty is in the Service, and knew she was going to Fiji, and knows she's a tandem couple, and knows she's going to have a problem with future assignments. They both have agreed that whoever gets the best job, if it is a really good job for her, then Craig will take a leave-of-absence until something opens up at that embassy. Or if he gets a really good job, she'll go along and maybe not work until there's an opening. They've studied each other's languages. I think for a FS career she has it more altogether, but by today's standard.*

DAVIS: Are tandem assignments still controversial? They were just starting them when I was overseas. It was unfair, because in order to be a tandem couple you had to be sent to a larger post which is usually more desirable, which is unfair to …

Q: It rules out places like Africa, where the tandem wife would be working for her DCM husband. So, yes. That was another complaint, that the tandems, especially as they go up in the Service, can only take the big posts like Rome and Paris and Madrid. Because that's the only place where there would be layering where so that she [end of tape]

*End of interview*