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

ELIZABETH (LIZ) KENNEDY LION

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi
Initial interview date: June 18, 1987

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTERVIEW

Q: What I am really interested in is how you spent your time in Rio and Recife. There were very few people who the staff at the consulate [in Recife] talked about, but the one name that kept cropping up was, "When Liz and Donor Lion were here... When Liz and Donor Lion were here." So you really made an impression.

LION: We were there longer probably than others. We had two tours that were interrupted by a year and eight months. So between the time we started and the time we left was about seven years - no, well whatever.

Q: Not to detract from your effectiveness in any way, but could it have partly been because that is when the military took over, or came back into power about the time you went....something happened around that time.

LION: Yes, that was 1964, the revolution... That happened just as we moved to Recife the first time. But also that was when the US was pouring lots of money into AID in the northeast.

Q: Which is why you were there. Is that when they were building all of those magnificent highways that are there now and things like that? What was the thrust of the AID?

LION: They did build highways and a lot of infrastructure but they did a lot with schools and I think they did a good bit with agriculture. Donor tried very hard to get some land reform going with something called GERAN. And they had all sorts of things worked out to compensate people who gave up land. But I think the mistake that they made was that they did not take into the planning the people who had the power.

Q: Who had the land to give up.

LION: And I also came to the conclusion, and I have read since people who agreed with it, that they [the Brazilians] will give up anything in the world except land. And I don't know, you probably have opinions on that subject, too.

Q: Well, I was absolutely astonished when I went down to a huge usina [sugar plantation], a feudal manor about two hours, not even two hours, south of Recife... Lais Cabral da Costa was her name. Did you ever go down there?

LION: Yes.

Q: Well, it was like something out of the middle ages.

LION: Of course it is. They have their own schools, they have their own police, they just [control] the entire lives of the people there. I think she told me that they had 3,000 people living there. She also ran a creche to take care of children of working mothers, the empregadas [servants] who were working in households. She had some sort of social conscience. At another usina they built a school and a clinic and a recreational center with a pool for them, and they had some housing they built, a little bit. But they also decided who was going to be mayor of the town.

Q: I think even if Donor had consulted them, people like that family, I don't think they would have given up anything [land] to those [workers]. As you say they are generous to a point.

LION: It wouldn't have worked. They think that the system is right.

Q: Well, that's it. They don't think there is anything wrong with the way things are.

LION: I agree with that, and I don't know what's going to happen. Apparently a communist governor has been elected in Pernambuco [state], or either mayor of Recife in the last year or so. And my friends the Petribus apparently got pretty uneasy about the situation. It seems to have settled down now. They want me to come visit them in October. I am in frequent contact with them. They just sent me a nice gift for Ann's baby.

Q: Well, do they come up here occasionally.

LION: Yes, they visited me in my home, but they insisted on staying in a hotel. They had just come to see me in Richmond.

Q: Do you still do your bed and breakfast?

LION: Yes, I do. I have generally had a student living in the house, and I seem to have people most of the time. I had a French professor all last fall, and I had a young Quaker couple from January to March, I guess. No later, and the next week friends of mine who were redoing their kitchen moved in - they didn't have any water and lights and so forth - and they are still there. They're not making much progress.

Q: When I stopped to visit you on the way to see my mother and her college friend, you were in social work, and then how did you decide to go into the Peace Corps?

LION: Well, I retired six months after I was sixty-five. And went into the Peace Corps in January, 1984, and I returned at the end of my tour in March of '86. And then most of '86 and several months of this year I was back working temporarily at Social Services, where I worked before [in Richmond]. And then I started working just half time there because I had intended to work at the Peace Center when I came back. So I worked there mornings and worked at Social Services in the afternoon.

The Peace Center is seven or eight years old. It is a clearing house for peace activities in Richmond. Richmond has lots of organizations that are connected with peace in one way or another. From very conservative sorts to liberal ones, Witness for Peace, for instance. They go regularly to Central America. But the Ginter Park Presbyterian church, for instance, has been running a series on the roots of violence and other things to do with the penal system and so forth, in the mornings before the regular service on Sunday mornings. The man who actually started the Peace Center is Methodist and Quaker. The secretary when I first got there was Unitarian and the current secretary is Mennonite.

Q: Interesting combination.

LION: These churches are the predominant in our membership. But our newsletter goes out to about 600 people every month. And Richmond is a fairly conservative area.

Q: How can the Administration continue talking about Star Wars and building up in the Middle East, how can they do that when I really believe most people in the country are against what they are doing.

LION: I know. Because that sort of person wants to be macho and needs an enemy to keep things going that they want to keep going. I don't say that their intentions are bad, they think they are right, as we think we are. But they're organized, and all the peace groups are sort of splinter groups. But for instance, the percentages in polls for nuclear freeze have been 60, 70 even 80 for years, years.

Q: I was interested to see that the Soviets have put that satellite up there to try to create solar energy because maybe they learned something with Chernobyl. Maybe they have had this capacity - it's either up or they are putting it up - and it will generate solar energy.

LION: That sounds good.

Q: It sounds great to me. I didn't mean to get that far off on Peace, I wanted to ask you about Jamaica and your Peace Corps. Did you go back to Jamaica and do in the Peace Corps more or less an extension of what you had done while you were there with AID.

LION: There were two things I did when I was there as an AID wife. I taught people who couldn't read and write, but it was actually adolescents. Mostly it was an adult program but I taught the 15 year olds and up. And I did that four days a week, I guess, but other times I worked several hours a week in Bankra Craft, and it was run by a woman I got to like very much, Marian Skinner.

Q: And what was the name of it again.

LION: Bankra Craft. It's a type of basket, and it also means load. It was started for very poor women, who lived in lower Kingston, and had children and there was just no - they

had no income, and Marian Skinner started it. Well, she was there within the first year. There was a group of about six or eight women that started it, but only Marian kept on. For years and years and years it was only Marian. She never made money from it, it only cost her money. She was Jamaican, she was one of my heroines, so I went back to work with her.

It isn't easy to go to a particular place in Peace Corps, usually they just assign you somewhere. But Marian is very determined, and she kept on writing and I kept on trying too. But she died two weeks after I got there.

Q: Oh, no.

LION: Yes. They had a Peace Corps volunteer there already, so there were two of us. So actually it went very well.

Q: Actually you had known from before what her goals were and what she was trying to do, so it wasn't as if you just stepped into something.

LION: Well, the Peace Corps volunteer who was already there had been there a year. And she was doing all the bookkeeping part of it and keeping track of whether they were earning money or not, and things of that sort. And what I came in and some of the things she did not do, was design and working with - some of the women were very crabby and did not do good work, and what I did was establish - they were paid, it was piece work entirely when I went there. But I added quality to the way you arrived at what they were paid, which meant that you had to judge every single piece, and you had to have in writing what you were judging them on.

And that took quite a while to get everybody on board. And there were two or three who were really crabby and that took a long time, but we did get them so that they wanted to do good work.

Q: Did your interest in handicrafts begin in Rio, or Recife, or before that? Did it begin in Brazil and you took it to Jamaica?

LION: I had an undergraduate major in art. And I had always taken little craft courses here and there and I consider myself a jack of all crafts. And when I got to Recife that was the first time I had ever worked with poor people to get them to make saleable products. And I sold them for them, in my dining room, and we had plenty of visiting firemen in those days that helped with sales. And Recife, as you know, has wonderful crafts, and I think that they really got recognized along about that time. Several Peace Corps volunteers worked with crafts.

Q: This would have been early 60s?

LION: Yes, right, mid-60s, 1964. And now I have seen guidebooks that talk about Recife

crafts, and there was a song about Brazil that talked about crafts in Recife that I heard. I think it really is known now for that, and what I love about Recife crafts, is that there are things that they have always done, many of the skills, it's not something - you know, Jamaica tries very hard, and they need to, but they have had all kinds of UN people and American and so forth coming in teaching people how to do different things, and that sort of craft doesn't necessarily last.

And I've seen some wonderful designs from Jamaica, and then the people who taught them leave and they just sort of fade away and get worse and worse. There are certain things that Jamaica makes well, particularly their hamper baskets - they make wonderful baskets - but a lot of the things are not native. Seaga has tried very hard to get the crafts on a good basis, but I think their management has been poor, because money has been POURED into it. They have lots of machines and things and some of them are not used any more. For instance, they had a weaving section that had many looms in it and while I was there it just folded. And the pewter, they had a pewter section that made knives, forks and spoons, and some other things out of pewter, and as far as I know that was very limping along, almost closing.

Q: The thing that interests me, even though you were busy as principal officer's wife in Recife, you had time to develop something that you thought was worthwhile on your own, too. You weren't overwhelmed by...

LION: Well, I had lots of household help.

Q: But that's it, we all had lot's of household help. I've talked to several women who had the potential help that you and I had in Brazil, in Africa, where ever, and couldn't come to terms with it and had a terribly unhappy experience there, because I am sure that every day was the white glove treatment. And finally all servants were banished and she did everything herself. Of course, anybody who will come in and do my house work for me is welcome.

LION: Well, I think that in poor countries you really should hire people, give them work, even if they don't get paid very much, at least they get fed and probably housed if they live in. I have no patience with people who... There was a couple, he was hired as principal of the American School there, and they said they were sort of Jeffersonian democrats, they wanted to do all their own work. And I thought, this is really unchristian of them to not hire people when there are so many people hungry. I think they didn't take my advice, as I remember.

Q: I just can't imagine in the tropics, when your house is open like that all the time, my house was always dusty, no matter what the steward did every morning, it was always dusty because winds blew through all day long, and it wasn't air conditioned.

LION: Donor was supposed to have been kidnapped you know, so we had to have people.

Q: Oh, no, I didn't, tell me about that.

LION: They apparently found the plans and everything like the night before he was supposed to be kidnapped.

Q: Who found them? The police? Someone must have tipped them off or something.

LION: I don't remember any more. They also had a safe house and they had written a confession for Donor. And one funny thing about it was there was an American girl, she was half Brazilian, half American, I think her grandfather had been governor of one of the states, not Pernambuco, who was also involved, and the police broke into where they were, shooting, and shot off a finger of her hand or something and Donor, however, didn't want her being tortured or anything, so he had somebody from the consulate visit every day to make sure. And she was eventually exchanged for some prisoners in Algeria or something, I don't know what. And her mother wrote Donor a very nice letter, thanking him.

Q: That is a new twist on kidnaping and terrorism. That must have been before C. Burke Elbrick was kidnapped. He must have been...

LION: It was about the same time. We were there during that time. He had just been up to visit Recife and he was kidnapped the next weekend, I think.

Q: Oh, really? So when they couldn't... When the plans to take Donor were foiled...

LION: No, I think Donor was supposed to have been kidnapped after that.

Q: As part of a series?

LION: We were during that kidnaping time is all I was saying.

Q: I had never heard that in all my years in Recife.

LION: I remember that we went to a party that night, it came out that day and we went to a party that night, and I was a little shook, and normally at a party I always visited with everybody and so forth. But that night I just didn't feel up to it. I just talked to another American woman who was there because I just felt sort of done in. I hadn't even wanted to go out, but Donor said that it was the safest time of all, everybody was alerted at this point.

Q: Well, and to show that you had confidence in the police, in the community.

LION: Of course, they wanted Donor protected because you see they were kidnaping in hopes of getting some of their people released. So they would protect...

Q: That's why they kidnapped Ambassador Elbrick, isn't it, because they wanted to trade him.

LION: Well, at any rate, in the newspaper the next day the society columnist noted that I didn't circulate and only talked to an American woman.

Q: Did you save all those clippings from the Diário de Pernambuco (local newspaper in Recife)? About what you wore, and where you...

LION: Oh, no, not any.

Q: Oh, I saved them all.

LION: You did?

Q: And you know what I did with them, I clipped them out and put them in our photograph album, more or less with pictures we took at that time, the pictures have nothing to do with the little squibs. My favorite one was, I mentioned to somebody at a reception at the [governor's] palace that I had sent home a copy of the Diário with the Carnival pictures because I thought it was such a splendid way to show someone in the United States what Carnival was like in Recife. Of course, the next day on their equivalent of the Style page, it was in a box that "Jóia Fenzi had sent home the copy of the Diário with all of the Carnival pictures." It was sort of sweet in a way.

LION: There was one society columnist. I've forgotten what his name was.

Q: What was his name? Isn't that awful!

LION: We made a real attempt not to be identified with the sociedade, and he got real upset with us because we never invited him to any parties. And one time we had an enormous party and did invite him and he didn't come. He sent somebody who worked for him to the party, but you know, we didn't mind about that.

Q: Guido also absolutely refused to get involved in it. But there was a cute little reporter, Fernando, and he was assigned to the consulate and he would call - was Lúcia - Oh, I should have looked all these names up before we started talking! Lúcia who was Guido's right hand woman and his commercial assistant...Fernando used to call her a couple of times a week to find out what we were doing, and where we were going, and the one thing I made him promise, and he was very, very good about it, I said don't say that we're going, write about it when we come back. Because I said that I don't want anybody to know that we're not there and it's only the guard, who no longer had weapons at that point, their weapons had been taken away, and by that time people were robbing with guns in Recife and machetes and what have you. I said I don't want anyone to know that we are not there and the guards are there alone. So write about it after we've come back. He was very good about that.

LION: Good. I don't know that we ever saved them. I don't even remember. We had clippings to do with AID, but I remember one time that this reporter whose name we can't remember remarked about.

Q: Joao Alberto!

LION: No, that's not the one.

Q: Then you had another one before us, but Joao Alberto took over exactly the same attitude and everything.

LION: He remarked that my dress was almost franciscana - so plain.

Q: We were always being told that we were muito simples, muito simples, which meant very homelike and unaffected.

LION: Unaffected is what it means, not homelike. It's a compliment.

Q: It's a compliment, well, just like yours was a compliment.

LION: No, it wasn't. You know St. Francis went around in rags all the time.

Q: Well, I know, but maybe it had come to mean understated.

LION: Well, that's what the surface meant, but I think underneath he was getting back at me.

Q: I don't remember that they ever directly commented on what I wore because it disinterested them so. It wasn't dripping with gold chains and loud, big prints to make me look bigger than I already am.

LION: Well, I thought the Brazilian women do an awfully good job of looking beautiful at any age.

Q: I couldn't get into the dyed hair. I just refused to dye my hair.

LION: Well, I color my own.

Q: But yours is tastefully done. It's not raven, black.

LION: No, I leave a little gray, a little irregularity.

Q: But you obviously had a good time in Recife.

LION: I had a wonderful time. I loved it, I loved it.

Q: I was exhausted all the time, but really it was great fun in retrospect.

LION: And our predecessors, the consul general there, her attitude was that it was really a hardship post and what everybody should do was to take care of the poor other wives. And I had a ball, I loved Recife. You know I also wrote a little book Beira Mar, the little book I wrote and illustrated (about shells and sea life).

Q: You always had the interest in crafts. You had a minor in crafts in college, is that right?

LION: I had a major in art. And I always took every little craft course that I could.

Q: Actually, there weren't very many crafts in Rio, were there, as there were in Recife?

LION: I think Recife is more known for their crafts, but my daughter and son-in-law lived in Brazil year before last, in Brasilia and Rio, and they have loads of beautiful things, many crafts.

Q: Let's go back. You had an art major and you always took all of your crafts. I remember the last time we talked, you referred to yourself as a "jack of all crafts."

LION: That I am.

Q: And you took that interest to Recife. I had just asked you, although you had that interest in art and crafts all along, was, in a way, what you did in trying to get the rather impoverished women some sort of income in Recife, was it both an extension of AID work in Brazil, plus a development of your own interest in crafts? This is when you told me you were a social worker and a bleeding heart.

LION: A social worker by profession and bleeding heart by temperament.

Q: Yes. So where did the crafts fit into this?

LION: Well, crafts were a great way to help poor people get some income. Generally, I worked with people who already were doing something or other. In a few cases, I taught people to do a craft from scratch.

Q: What were the women doing in Recife -- the embroidery and the appliqué and lovely towels and tablecloths and napkins and things, or did you teach them to expand on a craft like that?

LION: The one woman that I worked with a lot was Maria José Neponucena.

Q: Neponucena. Do you have any idea how to spell it?

LION: Well, she didn't know exactly.

Q: I'm not surprised.

LION: But Neponucena is good enough. Sometimes she would call it Neponucena, but I saw Neponucena written occasionally. I never saw the other, that's my recollection, at any rate.

Q: Who was she, exactly?

LION: She is quite well-known. She did woodcarving. She worked entirely in wood. She started out when she was very poor, making knives and forks and spoons for people to use as cutlery, and almost everything she ever made had a utilitarian purpose.

Q: Now, she made those for people in the favelas to use as cutlery?

LION: No.

Q: For people to buy?

LION: She just walked along the residential streets and knocked on the door. That was my impression. She made me some of the knives, forks and spoons, samples of what she had done early on. They're very nice.

Q: The lovely woods they have there.

LION: Yes. She used dark wood on the handle part, appliquéd to the handle, and lighter wood for the functioning part of the cutlery. Very nice. I think the first things she became known for were the wooden chickens that came apart.

Q: Oh, yes!

LION: I think that the tail was a spoon inside, and it was used for farofa.

Q: Yes. And I sent some of those home.

LION: They're very well known. I've seen them in magazines from Brazil, and I think she generally had more orders than she could fill. She made every sort of animal, finally, for containers. What else did she make?

Q: I wonder if she was up in the old slave market in Olinda? Did you go there when you were back in Recife?

LION: Oh, lots of times but that's not where she was. She lived outside of Recife, I believe. I should have prepared this and looked up some of these things. When I first met her, she was on an abandoned sugar mill, and I don't know where the owner was; he lived in town or something. But she told me one time, she was inviting me to come again, "sou euo que manda" -- "I who order." But I think she was eventually ordered out. I don't know if somebody bought it. But she, by that time, was able to buy a house in town, in Jaboatão, where she lived, and a refrigerator, when I was there. When I went back to see her she was employing other people. She always put color on the things that she did, and she had so many orders that she would have to hire other people. She did have one man working for her that did turning, which really wasn't her thing. He made wooden candlesticks and sometimes colored those. The colors were perfectly lovely.

Q: Was she able to keep up the quality of her craft? One of the things that happened in Tracunhãen, for instance, when Maria and Nuca made those marvelous lions and giraffes and things, was that, there again, they had so many orders that they couldn't fill, and so they started bringing in their nephews and what have you, and immediately the quality went down.

LION: Yes. Well, her quality went down, too. She became allergic to the paints and the varnish that she was using, shellac, whatever it was, her hands would break out, and she also got very depressed. I went back to Recife twice and visited her both times. She moved to Sao Paulo to be with her daughter. I sort of lost contact with her, so I'm not sure where she is now.

Q: But she was one of the people that you were able to help, or was she started already when you arrived in Recife?

LION: She was started already, but we sold a lot of crafts in my dining room, because I kept the things out with prices on them and so forth. And whenever we had visiting firemen, it was much easier for them to buy there.

Q: How nice!

LION: We sold really a lot of stuff.

Q: And you were doing these visiting firemen a favor, too, because you probably didn't have the Casa de Cultura in those days, did you?

LION: That was the old [prison]. No, they did not have that then.

Q: I think that opened shortly before we arrived. Of course, that was marvelous, because sometimes you could take a visiting fireman over and just turn him loose, and say, "The driver will be back at such and such an hour."

LION: That's a wonderful place.

Q: I never got tired of going through there.

LION: I loved it myself. I just loved it. Well, I had fixed prices, too, and maybe they would like what I selected, and I could oversee the quality.

Q: So you probably did save them a lot of time, because you had quality things, and at Casa de Cultura you did have to wade through an awful lot that you weren't interested in.

LION: Well, they had a lot of wonderful things there, and the prices were wonderful. Actually, I was told that the prices were fixed there, too. I'd forgotten that. And I do remember one time, though, that Helena Petribus tried to bargain with somebody and they would not bargain, and I was glad they wouldn't.

Q: So starting with the woman who worked with wood, then you also worked...

LION: Actually, that isn't where I started.

Q: No?

LION: I'm just remembering now. The first time we were in Recife, there was a young man -- how did I -- I found out that he was a very good wood carver. However, he was in the Casa de Detencão, which was still a prison then. I went around and looked at all the wooden fruit that different people had, different wives who had other posts, and the nicest fruit was from the Philippines. So I got them to making that, and it was great for the Casa de Detencão because it required a great deal of time to make the fruit nicely, and they had plenty of that.

Q: Plenty of time!

LION: They loved to put varnish or shellac on it. Finally I said, "I'll pay you 45 [whatever it was] for the ones without varnish, and I will only pay you 30 for the ones with varnish." They never put on another coat of varnish.

Q: Good for you! Not a drop of varnish.

LION: And the quality was beautiful. One of the former inmates took to selling them all over Recife, and they sold extremely well. But when I went back to Recife some years later, they were nowhere. One of the reasons, I think, was that the whole Casa de Detencão was moved way outside Recife and I don't think they had any way to get the stuff back and forth easily.

But I learned another thing, which was that if you introduce a craft that's not indigenous, that doesn't have roots there, it will probably die when you leave. There were excellent Peace Corps volunteers in crafts in Recife when I was there. One of them did wonderful

cloth animals; another did black pottery, which wasn't very strong, however; weak, in fact. It got black by putting in leaves when you fired it. The other Peace Corps volunteer -- there were two couples and a single volunteer -- was smart, he bought stuff that was already made from all the people all around, and helped them. Whereas the other couples tried to start new crafts, which were absolutely nowhere to be seen. Also, there were really nice batiks when we were there. They faded after a while but the taste was very good, the colors were nice, the designs were of everything Brazilian, though I wouldn't call them Brazilian designs. Then they too totally disappeared.

Q: You know, they weren't being made in Recife when we were -- they were coming up from somewhere else.

LION: Yes.

Q: To what do you attribute the lack of a craft that has some momentum when it's started by a volunteer but that dies when the volunteer leaves? Why couldn't the Brazilians, if they were making money on it, why couldn't they realize that, if they kept it up, I wonder?

LION: I believe that lack of management skills is a really big thing. But the couple that made the animals said that they could do the work beautifully, and it was beautiful work; but I guess they really rode hard on their people to do everything perfectly.

Q: Quality products.

LION: But they said that there was so much fighting among the people who worked, and it was a cooperative, I guess. So much fighting about who would be -- I don't know, the leader, whatever; that they felt that it would fail on that account. But the wife of the governor, when she saw those animals, which I thought were spectacular, said, "A child would be afraid of those." They were quite contemporary design, and in fact this nice young couple copied them out of an American book. The girl's father had started the New York Craftsman's Guild, or something and she was very "into" American design, I guess. But I do think the best thing the Peace Corps volunteers or anybody could do, helping out in crafts, would be to help them improve their quality and maybe their sources of raw material or find new sales outlets. But the thing you have to be really careful about -- that I think people in that situation have a hard time doing -- is not to be the manager, not doing things for people and then trying to train them to do what you were doing. I don't think it works very well.

In Bankra Craft -- that's where we made the dolls, in Jamaica -- they got a lot of help off and on but they had a Jamaican woman there from the outset, for about l2 years. She died; that's the only reason she wouldn't still be doing it.

Q: You mentioned her, Marian Skinner?

LION: Marian Skinner. But they did get a lot of designs over the years from different

people, and they're still using them and still making money off of those designs. So that part was good. That worked.

Q: So you really cut your teeth on helping the poor make money with their handicrafts skills in Recife. And so then when you went to Jamaica, how did you get involved when you were the AID director's wife?

LION: I started out teaching in JAMAL, a program for illiterate adults. From there I was referred to Marian Skinner because they knew I was interested in crafts. I worked about one afternoon a week with her -- did drawings, wrote down steps of production, costing, etc. Marian and I have kept in touch. She came to see me a couple of times and I saw her when I returned to visit Jamaica. Then when I entered Peace Corps I asked to be sent there. It required considerable persistence to get in, I guess I wore them down. Persistence was the quality that got you into Peace Corps. I was glad they told me that! Otherwise, I might have concluded they didn't want me. I was tempted to use some connections but I didn't.

Q: Anyway, you got in. You mentioned the lovely house you had, as AID director's wife, with a swimming pool; and obviously a much more active social life.

LION: Well, the house I occupied as PC volunteer was perfectly acceptable; and my landlady was very famous in Jamaica -- Olive Lewin. Through her, I had contacts I would not have had as AID director's wife. For instance, on Christmas morning we breakfasted with the prime minister. It was he who gave away our daughter at her wedding, he attended the wedding dinner in our home. I met many interesting people through her, more than I met as wife. Marian was head of art and culture. She started the Folksingers, who are very well known. I don't know what her title is. She initiated the Youth Orchestra, started the Oral History Project, and is supposed to have collected something like l,300 folk songs. She attended the Royal School of Music, or some such school, the school for musicians in England. She had received the highest marks ever reached in the Caribbean for entrance at that school.

Marian's father was a very well-known person in education in Jamaica, a close friend of the prime minister (I don't recall his name) for some years. Marian Skinner's sister was a folk singer, she knew of me and asked me to come stay with her before I even met her. I felt well accepted as a volunteer. I feel that when you're not working for pay and you really enjoy the country and have skills to offer, the doors are open. I could have worked at a number of different sites -- indeed, I worked at four. Including in Kingston. I did some design work for Allsides, a lot of work for Things Jamaican, and for Bankra: that was supposed to be my main site. I worked at Women's Bureau a bit. I started the straw bags at Operation Peace -- they're still going pretty well -- knock on wood!

Q: So you've now been back for more than a year. I hope I'm not being facetious, but really, which was more fun -- being a volunteer or the AID director's wife?

LION: Being a volunteer, I guess. I think that doing "your own thing", if you feel you're doing it well, and having some success, is more fun than doing what you're supposed to do.

Q: More rewarding?

LION: I'll buy that! Or if "rewarding" sounds too weighty, more exhilarating. Sounds more elegant than "more fun." Marian let me rent her car. Before I went back to Jamaica, I had some uneasiness about the change from being AID director's wife to Peace Corps volunteer. It seemed to me that I'd be standing on a street corner in rain, waiting for a bus, my former friends would ride by, and I'd hope they wouldn't recognize me. Perhaps they would not pick me up because of my change in status. I have a little reverse snobbery in me, though! For instance, I'd never buy an expensive car; I generally buy one a year old. I'm like that.

Q: Where I come from, that's called Yankee practicality.

LION: Yes. Well, I think I said earlier that I'm a Quaker, I belong to the Quaker Meeting in Richmond. I'm not impressed by a lot of things to do with money and position, unless the possessors earned those attributes themselves.

Q: So many of the people we dealt with in Recife really had done nothing to earn what they possessed in life, had they? It had just been handed down generation to generation.

LION: Yes, well, particularly women. It doesn't apply to my friend Helena Petribu, however. She did an awful lot for her people. And really, I knew a number of women who were tremendously busy, who had strong social consciousness. I worked with Ivanise Pessoa and with others on the board that started the Community Center in a favela.

I also worked with the Associação Cristão Feminina, the YWCA. Ruth Hillis, you know, was there from World War II on for a long time, then she was hired to come back and establish this Community Center in a favela, which had classes for women, day care, a dental clinic. I think they even had a family planning clinic after a while, and a mothers' club.

Q: I met Hillis. She had come down to run the hotel in Macéio. And what was the name of the woman, very, very wealthy, who'd been married to someone who was -- she'd married a vice consul who had quit. Their name was Helena?

LION: Yes, yes. I would find that in some of my address books. She was very nice, I liked her, but she was weird, very weird. Ruth Hillis was very nice to her and supportive.

Q: Yes. And the family's father came from Sweden, the name was Scandinavian, and they made their money in gunpowder.

LION: Oh, I didn't know that.

Q: Yes. And the logo for the gunpowder was an elephant. I think my husband would recall the last name. (they agree they'll probably think of it shortly) But Ruth Hillis came back to run that hotel in Maceio, which was being terribly successful, not with foreign tourists but from all the Brazilians coming up from São Paulo, mainly. The reason she came back was because her medical insurance wasn't valid outside the U.S. Worry over possible catastrophic illness had brought her back.

LION: Yes. Well, she's been doing very useful things in, I believe Arizona or New Mexico, where she lives. She told me over the phone, "I find things that need to be done and I do them, and I get people to help me." I think that's one of the best recipes for success. I would like to have it on my wall.

Q: Now you have it, on tape.

LION: Okay! She's a wonderful person, and a very simple person. Very bright, she knew everybody, and she's totally fearless. But she could keep her eye on the ball and get things done. She had no pretensions of dress, money, things like that. She knew how to establish boards. I guess she established the ACF [the YWCA] there. And she taught generations of Brazilian women how to run organizations, how to raise money, how to have board meetings, take minutes. And there are any number of organizations spawned by people who were trained on ACF boards. If you want to search for something successful, look at Ruth Hillis's training.

Q: I think I mentioned to you when we talked earlier the two people at the consulate who were cited over and over and over again were you and Donor, and Ruth Hillis.

LION: When we went to Recife the first time, she was due back. Everywhere I went they'd say, "Ruth's coming back!" They loved her and she loved them. A wonderful person.

Q: I'm getting back to Jamaica now. You said the house you stayed in was closed up at night.

LION: Yes: the lizards. They drive me crazy. A great many Jamaicans -- mostly women but some men, too -- are scared to death of little lizards that don't bite. They're not poisonous, they don't "do" anything, they're scared of you, too. I don't understand it but the fear goes from generation to generation. Olive Lewin's sister, a nurse, was living there then. She'd worked in Canada, lived in England. She had the helper close all the windows in her room every day at dusk. Everyone in the house did, except me. My room only had windows on one side.

Q: So you had no cross draft.

LION: Right. Two things that would keep me from returning to Jamaica for any long term would be the heat and lack of a car. Perhaps I should have gotten a fan, I never had much faith in their utility, then. But another factor: Olive was very economical. I would have been glad to pay for an increase in her electricity bill. Frankly, I didn't live on my Peace Corps income. I had a little thing that paid me $l75 a month and that I deposited in my checking account in the U.S. Bankra always had a surplus in their account, or at least good credit, so I could always cash a dollar check immediately.

Q: So you really lived as a guest in Olive Lewin's house.

LION: Yes. Of course, I paid rent. I loved having all my meals taken care of, though they weren't usually what I would have chosen. Boiled vegetables, for one thing -- Jamaicans boil them all to death, with a bit of salt; that's all. No vitamins left. Most Jamaicans don't care for salad, and if they do, it's only shredded cabbage with a few slivers of carrot and no dressing.

Absolutely delicious in Jamaica are the fruit drinks. Drinks are made out of everything and they're universally delicious, all of them. Even out of some really curious things like cucumber and pumpkin. They season them nicely, though they insert a lot of condensed milk, which strikes me as improper -- all that sugar. But the drinks are delicious, especially the soursop.

Q: Let's talk about food. For instance, the Brazilians' ambrosia.

LION: Yes. If I had to name something that was ambrosia on this earth, it would be theirs. And their fruit ice creams, particularly at Devon House in Kingston, which I think are the best in the world, certainly the best I've ever tasted. Brazil grows every sort of fruit. Their soursop is wonderful, and the guava, and coconut, and many sorts of fruit. They also make some wonderful dishes. They have a curry chicken, and curry goat not curried. I don't believe there's any difference between "curry" and "curried," it's just called curry goat. Also, their pumpkin soup is quite good, and a sort of sauce they put on chicken or any other meat -- of tomato, onion, thyme, etc. which they use on all meats; very tasty. Unlike their vegetables, the meat is generally flavorful.

Q: Do you remember, in Recife, if we were having, say, visiting firemen from Brasilia, for just an informal lunch, if it were for Brazilians, no vegetables: they just didn't eat them. Only rice.

LION: They wanted the rice and beans and meat; maybe a little bit of kale. And, like you, I loved the fruit drinks in Recife. They never had condensed milk in them, just fruit juice with a little sugar.

Q: We used to add water. I loved the names: pitanga, mangaba, cajú, maracujá, goiaba, graviola -- they were wonderful names!

LION: Graviola is soursop, isn't it?

Q: Yes.

LION: When we were in Recife, graviola was not well-known, not much used. I remember somebody gave us one once, brought from some place on the Amazon.

Q: We always had a pitcher of those juices in our refrigerator.

LION: I loved the pitanga.

Q: So did I, I liked the color of it, which is about that of your blouse. The flavorings for the meats in Recife are cooked fresh every day -- all fresh, the coriander, onion, pepper, tomato. I was fond of coriander already. We had it in Morocco. Did they use that in Jamaica, too?

LION: Not that I remember. However, they could have included it in sauce and I not have noticed, because actually, I didn't cook in Jamaica. A tree-grown fruit is ackee, very beautiful. Jamaicans often make it a design motif. The fruit is a lovely rosy red on the outside. The inside resembles scrambled eggs. There are generally three very black, shiny seeds hanging on the ends. The fruit is tripartite -- three parts to its shell, three seeds, and three parts to the fruit. If you eat it before it has burst open, some sources say, it may be quite poisonous -- some say it causes deaths every year, for instance of children who can't wait to open and eat it. Such occurrences don't appear in the papers because of reluctance to advertise them. A medical professional told me, "Oh no, there are antidotes you can take if you have eaten it, it's not all that dangerous." But I often heard that it was.

Q: I was surprised to learn that casava has cyanide in it, that it must be properly cured. I heard that animals in Brazil die if they eat it. Those woven things that the Indians have --

LION: Yes, for squeezing the juice out of the grated casava.

Q: Did you ever have a West African post?

LION: No.

Q: We started in Sierra Leone, went from there to Curaçao, then to Brazil, and lastly to Trinidad. You're sort of southern, aren't you?

LION: Yes.

Q: Would a southerner ever admit that their lovely cuisine --

LION: Had African strings?

Q: Absolutely has African roots, because all the cooks were the black slaves who had some from Dahomey [Benin] and Togo and Nigeria or wherever. I thought one time of writing a book on the various African foods, just those using plantains. What does a Venezuelan do with a plantain? A Trinidadian? It's amazing, all the variations there are. Wouldn't that be an interesting project?

LION: Yes, absolutely!

Q: And our jambalaya, I'm sure comes from the West African jollof rice, having made its way across the Atlantic. The Brazilian version is marvelous.

LION: Jambalaya is a New Orleans dish.

Q: Oh, yes, but I'll bet you anything in the world it came from --

LION: Well, they consider that most of their things are French, you know.

Q: Some of them are, but many are --

LION: French or Spanish. The creole food, which is supposed to be a combination by French and Spanish aristocrats.

Q: Yes, yes; with a little African slave cooking added. I'm looking up the dishes' names.

LION: I once lived in New Orleans, and it was there I first became interested in cooking, although as a southerner I've always been interested in food.

Q: I'm looking up the African -- well, the moquecas, I love that. It's Brazilian, basically a stew but it has oleo de dendê, palm oil, in it. If you wanted to get some here, I'd call the Sierra Leone embassy and ask them, or inquire of the Brazilian embassy where they get oleo de dendê for their Brazilian dishes like bobo de camarão.

LION: I recall a dish of fish with white sauce that had oleo de dendê in it, called vatapá.

Q: And bacalhau --

LION: Is that like vatapá?

Q: No, it's more like moqueca but it doesn't have -- the shrimp with coconut cream didn't have palm oil in it, but there was thick coconut cream in all those dishes. But one of the things, perhaps I told you -- I went out to the Joaquim Nabuco Institute to talk to Dr. Mario Soto de Maior in fear and trembling, because he was having a series of articles in the Diário de Pernambuco about called "Our Local Cuisine is Dying." You know, no one was making vatapá. So in some anxiety I intended to say to him, "Dr. Soto de Mayor, the reason is because they are so much work." But what I said was, "There's no reason why

they can't be more or less adapted, or done ahead of time." I mean, I don't think any Brazilian cook in Recife ever thought of doing her sauce or her bobo or the base for it a day ahead of time. And I had a few words with my Josefa, and showed her that it could be done so that she wasn't an absolute rag at the end of her day.

LION: What did Dr. Soto de Mayor say?

Q: Well, he was so amenable I couldn't believe it. Gradually I got so I would go out and see him again, which would add to the credibility of my cookbook, and got from him a quote to put on the back of the book if he said something about it. He and I exchanged recipes for drinks. He had one that I must admit I filtered because it was so evil-looking. It was one of his -- you know, made of one of those liqueurs of theirs, and it was the most evil-looking stuff. After being filtered it looked like a urine sample. No one wanted to try it.

LION: Never mind! You could say apple juice, couldn't you?

Q: Well, no, no you couldn't. It just looked like nothing more than what you put through that little door at the State Department when you were given your medical. But I'm talking too much: let's get back to Jamaica...

One of the primary reasons I originally wanted to talk with you was because I was so impressed with what you had done with your life after you were divorced, and you've just proved to me you had a good time, you went back to Jamaica, you built on what you'd absorbed as an AID wife. You've continued to grow and move forward, and I think that should be set down.

LION: Yes. I was able, also, to go back to work for the State of Virginia, in Social Services; because social work is my field, you know. When you came down to see me I was engaged in that. Within a couple of months after I got back I went to work for the Richmond Regional Office. I had been working for the Northern Virginia Regional Office before I went to Jamaica, and then I moved to the central office, staying there until I entered the Peace Corps. Since coming back I've worked there, mostly for half-days, for a little over a year.

Q: So you went back to work. A half-day is enough, isn't it?

LION: Yes. The reason I worked half-days is because I wanted to work half-days also at the Peace Center; and I did a little work for Steve Hodges' political campaign. But I can probably go back to Social Services. The jobs were temporary, and indeed they've invited me back for another stint, but I had to see about my daughter Ann's baby. I really am a bit bored here. As I mentioned, I'm thinking a little of going back to Jamaica. So we'll see.

Q: In what capacity? What would you do? Because you're not doing anything with crafts. Maybe that's your first love.

LION: Well, I'm interested in working on Olive Lewin's Book of Songs, on which she's dragging her feet. And then this craft anthology that the Prime Minister wanted written, which hasn't gotten off the ground. I did do an outline of it which everybody thought was very good. Both of these, particularly the music. I don't know anything about music but I know the people, and I can push on it. Maybe it would get done.

Q: I wonder if that goes back to -- well, one of the problems in the corporate world is that you're not necessarily given a project to do so in a way permitting you to see it through to the end. It's just that you're always chugging away at something. I wonder if going back to Jamaica and being able to work on a project and maybe see it through fruition doesn't have more appeal than what you're doing now.

LION: Yes.

Q: Maybe I'm oversimplifying.

LION: Well, no, I think that's true. There are certain things that Social Services -- that I would like to do even as a volunteer, because they're not being done properly and people would be glad to have me do them. It's just that there's nobody sufficiently interested who will pursue them. The things that I'm interested in there are not momentous, but they are things that I had a part in and that I'd like to see finished. So I might even do that, might work for nothing for Social Services.

Q: In playing back our tape, you sound more southern than I'd expected.

LION: I always sound more southern than I had hoped. I live in Richmond now. I grew up in South Carolina but I haven't lived in the South for 30 or 40 years.

Q: It interests me that you seem to build on your past experiences, you profit from what you've learned, you use it and take it on to your next -- if you want to name it, passage in life. I'm interested to see there seems to have been a certain direction in your life that you've maintained. You went to Rio, then to Recife, you came back here, you went to Recife, you went to Jamaica --

LION: Well, Oslo was the first post but I really didn't "do anything" in Oslo. I can't remember anything useful that I did there. For one thing, it took a while to get used to the cold, and the shopping -- it was right after World War II. I was much younger then. I recall being interested in one of their crafts but I never did anything about it.

Q: Another of the women I've interviewed had had a tour in Oslo and she said, "I didn't do anything in Oslo because the Norwegians did it all and there wasn't anything to do."

LION: You know, she had a point there. Norwegians are a very "adult" and competent people. I did learn how to ski a little bit.

Q: That's an accomplishment. I'd think about the only thing you'd do there would be to go out and help with some volunteer or charitable thing.

LION: Yes. I did work on the post report that we rewrote there. That's being useful, I think. In Recife we did a post notebook, so-called. I think it's a very helpful thing to newcomers. We said that the post report was what you read before arriving at post but the notebook was on matters you needed to know after you got there -- such as hours that places were open, directions for finding them, names of people including doctors that Americans used. I remember converting fever temperatures from Celsius to Fahrenheit. The notebook was loose leaf so we could periodically update it.

Q: The cover reproducing a woodcut is so attractive.

LION: I bought a few woodcuts there that enchanted me.

Q: I used your notebook as the basis for one we did called "Welcome to Recife." This is a project that needs to be updated and it's a very worth-while project for women to take on. We found it so useful to hand to VIPs and other visitors when they arrived. We had hoards of visitors -- security people, members of the embassy, Washington bigwigs, all presumably looking over the situation in the northeast of Brazil.

LION: I think Recife ought to be a tourist town. It's a very interesting place in South America -- buildings in Olinda, the Casa de Detencão, all the crafts.

Q: Yes. But even in the Oton Palace, which was the new hotel, absolutely no one spoke English -- not even the bellboys and desk clerks. And we had several of those -- oh dear, the Executive Service Corps, whom you recall the locals call "the paunch corps." And we had a number of women who typically came down with their husbands for three months and who were ensconced in this lovely luxury hotel. Many of them, knowing no Portuguese, couldn't even talk to the bellboy, couldn't talk to anyone, since the people they dealt with knew no English. There's a need to have the little man in the street know some English, as is true in other developing countries.

As you well know, things didn't "work" in Recife. But they don't always work in other places either. Ruth Hillis was doing such a superior job of running that hotel in Macéio for tourists that maybe the foreigners will discover it in time. Tourists were coming up, however, as pollution and overcrowding and other ills affected the south of Brazil.

LION: I understand the problem of flooding was partially taken care of. It reached the second floor when we were there.

Q: I have pictures of the whole consulate gardens under water. When we were there the usina [factory for processing sugarcane] was still dumping chemicals into the two rivers, the Capibaribe and the Beberibe, which were absolutely foul and black, killing all the

fish. People with all that money would spend nothing on pollution control. They did run some tests up and down the Boa Viagen Beach, pretty far away from the river's mouth, where we found a place to go that was rated as least polluted.

LION: You know, it seems to me that so many of the rich South Americans think they're very close to the United States because they're against communism. To them, however, communism means enabling the poor to get even a tiny piece of land. People in the U.S., you know, don't favor particular view.

Q: Why did Jamaica have the violence? Was it because of the huge, pressing urban problems in Kingston? Why did it have the violence that some of the other islands didn't?

LION: Frankly, I never really understood why. It seemed to be all in lower Kingston, and between the two political parties. A lot of Jamaicans are violently political. And it's true that Michael Manley and Seaga apparently really hated each other, but I doubt either of them, certainly not Seaga, favored violence. I don't understand it but purportedly 700 people were killed during the election that took place in l979 after we'd left. Things were heating up before we left in '78. Manley was a very good friend of Castro, you know, who used to visit the island. The two of them would tour the island together while Castro was speaking. I think Seaga is a very reasonable, nice, hard-working person. Olive Lewin's family adored him.

Q: Obviously, there is the Jamaican elite, whose parents studied in England, the lettered professional people. How large a portion of the society are they? In Trinidad, for example, many people were white.

LION: A number of people in Jamaica told me that there used to be much better relations between blacks and whites than is true now. My impression was that it had to do with worsening of relations with the United States, as blacks in the U.S. increasingly voiced wrongs they had suffered.

Q: So you think our civil rights movement had adverse effects there, evoked violence.

LION: I'm all in favor of the civil rights movement, certainly, but now the government is all-black -- Seaga is white but I believe all the cabinet members are black. Certainly they're dominant. Manley is probably about three-quarters white, possibly more.

Q: Did you ever feel afraid when you made your Peace Corps rounds?

LION: I never felt -- well, officially it was held that the violence is not against whites, nor Americans, it's the poor vs rich, or the really poor vs people who are comfortable. Those that live in lower Kingston are desperately poor. How they survive I don't know. Nor can I imagine how the Jamaican civil servants manage to live on their salaries.

Q: Those are the people I feel sorry for in Recife, too. They're just squeezed.

LION: Absolutely squeezed. One would think people could not live decently on a Jamaican monthly salary, but they did. By practicing many, many economies. For instance, watering down their liquid soap. They'd put a bit of it in an old bottle, then fill it with water. I'm not sure the resulting liquid did the job, one had to squirt so much of it. When I planned to paint a wall for Olive Lewin, one of her friends insisted that I mix the water-based paint half paint, half water. She also said she had put three coats on her walls. But in non-compliance with her advice, I put on only one coat, non-watered-down paint.

Q: The house boy who had been in our house when we arrived in Recife had been very good. He was literate, and our predecessor had arranged for him to step up in the world, to move into a white-collar job. It wasn't four months till he came back. Josefa the cook said, "Ah! that young man needs a good meal." She sat him down and fed him. He simply could not live on his salary as a typist in an office, his white-collar job. And of course there was no place for him when he came back.

Another example: Our servants had their refrigerator, we had ours. They never threw anything away from our table, eventually it went out to people in the street in the closest favela. Sometimes I went into their refrigerator and made them throw food out because there would be fish that had been saved for five or six days. I said, "You're going to kill those people!" All I needed was for someone from a favela to die because they'd had a handout from the American consulate residence!

LION: Perhaps you've heard about the AID business causing children to go blind? In northeast Brazil the AID people gave away a lot of powdered milk. The children grew so fast on it that they needed vitamin A supplement or something for their eyes. I don't know whether they really went blind but some damage to their eyes did result -- because they hadn't had the supplements, because they were growing too fast on the milk. The U.S. was severely blamed for "blinding all these children."

Q: Another case of good will going awry.

LION: Yes. To tell the truth, I think helping people in a way that helps them is very difficult. I'm sure that with the best intentions in the world and billions of dollars, we've done things that didn't help at all. Perhaps did the opposite over-all. I don't know.

***

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Former Spouse: Donor

Date Entered Service: 1952 Left Service: Divorced 1978

Posts:

1952	Oslo, Norway
1964-67	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
1968-71	Recife, Brazil
1977-78	Kingston, Jamaica

Status: Divorced spouse of AID director

Date and place of birth: Nashville, Tennessee - September 11, 1918

Maiden Name: Kennedy

Parents:
Henry Lee Kennedy, lawyer (never practiced) road building firm, Handricks and Kennedy
Corinne Peale Kennedy, housewife, violinist, and vocalist

Schools:
Winthrop College, U.S.C.
U.N.C.
Boston University
Louisiana State University, Tulane

Date and place of marriage: 1952, Oslo, Norway

Profession: Social worker, Peace Corps Volunteer

Positions held at post:
Oslo
* Contributed to notebook for new arrivals at embassy

Rio
* Volunteer in Orphanage
* Wrote resource booklet on charitable agencies where U.S. personnel volunteered
* Helped draft constitution for embassy/AID wives' group and served as Board member

Recife
* Directed an employment service for domestics for USG personnel
* Wrote and illustrated a book on marine life of the Beira Mar, Recife's coastal waters
* Sponsored and wrote the notebook for new arrivals at post
* Served on Board of YWCA (Associaçao Cristao Feminina)
* Served as Board member for settlement house
* Served as Board member for Women's Club
* Worked with crafts, i.e., directly with craft producer, with committee on crafts, sold crafts in my dining room to visiting firemen

Honors:
* Member of highest scholastic and honorary organizations as an undergraduate
* Meritorious Service Award, received from Mrs. Lincoln Gordon, spouse of ambassador to Brazil
* Commendation from Ambassador Frederick Irving, Jamaica
* Meritorious Service Award, Virginia State Department of Social Services

Children:

Amy Lion
Ann Lion Coleman

End of interview