

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

SUSKA K. MASSEY

*Interviewed By: Morris Weisz
Initial Interview Date: May 19, 1992*

Q: I've just finished an interview for the Labor Diplomacy Oral History Project with Mr. Parke Massey who had long experience with the training and observation of labor attachés in his service abroad, and in special service with the Department of Labor, and the Department of State training program.

It occurred to me, since I know of the Spousal interview program, that I might use part of this tape to interview Mrs. Parke Massey who was abroad in many posts with Parke, and who did live as a Foreign Service wife in various places.

Q: First, Mrs. Massey, your family background which you briefly indicated.

MASSEY: I was born in Austria, came to the United States to go to college, married Parke while I was still at college and was one of the first people to be permitted to continue at college after marriage, and finish.

Q: Which college was it?

MASSEY: Vassar, Poughkeepsie; then worked in New York for a bit while he was in the Army; then went to Haverford with him for a year while he finished his GI Bill; then went overseas wherever he went with great pleasure.

Q: That's one question -- "with great pleasure" because the experience of some of the women in the Foreign Service was not a great pleasure and for that reason I think you might want to outline what was pleasurable, what was not, and how you fitted in. But first let me just say that you have given the answer already just before we began to one of the questions here. Was your husband already in the Service when you met and when you married, and if not, did he...

MASSEY: He was not in the Service, but I assure you that we would never have lasted unless he had gone into the Service because I too from the beginning in my memory have always wanted to travel, see the world, and that's it. So the Foreign Service was ideal for both of us.

Q: Good, then you've answered the next question which is, if not, that is if he wasn't in the Foreign Service, did you discuss this decision with him, and you've told me that you did, and that you agreed with it. You didn't have to be dragged into the Foreign Service.

MASSEY: No. Nobody drags me.

Q: Did they train you in any way for going into the Foreign Service?

MASSEY: Not really. I think the Foreign Service met a few times.

Q: You did go to some of those preparatory meetings.

MASSEY: Yes, we were in Washington for about a month or so.

Q: Did you feel that that limited amount of training was of any value?

MASSEY: I thought reading the Post Report was extremely helpful, and you had the material and you could look things up for some preparation, but there isn't too much.

Q: What about the protocol aspects of it.

MASSEY: Well, in my day there was a lot of it and much of it was good and which I approve of, we were then the real Foreign Service before Wristonization. We were a family and everybody knew everybody socially; we called on people, we didn't turn down the corner and had it dropped off, you went. And that was helpful, I thought. It can be taken to an extreme, but that did not take place in those days, I don't think.

Q: Did that type of calling upon people result in any imposition on you of standards of life, or activities?

MASSEY: No, I don't think so because it was fairly done. I was expected to call on the ambassador's or the consul's wife, whoever was the top man, within 24 hours of arrival. On the other hand, she called back on me within 24 hours. And I remember the consul's wife in Genoa, when she arrived as she should have, found me diapering a baby and helped because I wasn't very good at it.

PARKE MASSEY: Protocol was important in introducing the new Foreign Service people into a new environment, a new situation, and a new society.

Q: So you set off for your first post with some anticipation, but any apprehensions?

MASSEY: No.

Q: No fear at all.

MASSEY: You don't have fears when you're in your early twenties. Never.

Q: Okay. Just a brief chronological listing -- oh, I have the listing of the posts with my interview with Parke and this will be part of it so you don't have to go over it. But what

was it like in each of these posts? What differences did you observe: first the European post then...Oh, first was Mexico...

MASSEY: Mexico, Genoa, Rome, Bonn and then Africa.

Q: What differences were there in the posts? The European much more formal, or not as formal?

MASSEY: Well, in the embassy surely not, with “natives”. I don’t know. I don’t think there was too much difference, of course Mexicans are so outgoing, and all-embracing you, that that posed no problem at all. Well, in Italy they were also a very friendly people, you had to know the language.

Q: Well, what about Germany?

MASSEY: That was difficult for me because I was not very fond of them, and it’s the only place where I had difficulties with the language since it is my mother tongue, and I refused to use the German word when I knew the Austrian word for the same article.

Q: Oh, really?

MASSEY: Oh, yes.

Q: Any reaction about that.

MASSEY: They say the [German], but I wasn’t going to say the [German].

Q: That’s interesting because my German is the eastern version also.

MASSEY: Nowhere did I have any trouble with languages, but in Germany.

Q: I’d be interested. How is that expressed. You used the wrong word.

MASSEY: I didn’t use the wrong word, I repeated the same word and eventually they came around to admitting that they knew what it was.

Q: Oh, really?

MASSEY: At first they were being German, which is also to say that I was outraged at the Department when we were eight years in Washington I went in and offered to help with any German program, either with conversation or at least preparing people with the language. They refused to hire me because my accent was not according to what they wanted. They wanted the German accent.

Q: What if they were training someone for Austria?

MASSEY: That is what I said too, but no...

Q: You mean people being trained for Austria had to know the German German, and not the Austrian?

MASSEY: Yes.

Q: That is fascinating. Okay, some specific questions. How did you feel about representational duties?

MASSEY: I don't think I had too many. I mean, I refused several things. I simply said, "No, I can't," or "I don't have time." I went to attend parties and to help, that, of course, you do that, to see that strangers don't stay in a corner, that you pull them in but that's only politeness. You do that automatically.

Q: But you gave this instance in the questionnaire. The questionnaire asked about specific instances of being asked...this finger food experience.

MASSEY: Well, there were two experiences which stand out in my mind. One was the Nelson Rockefeller visit to Nicaragua in which the day before he was giving a stag party. I was called by the wife of the deputy and would I bring 200 finger foods. Would I prepare them and bring them, and I informed them that I was playing bridge that afternoon, had no time, but was there any reason why I could not have it catered? To which they said, "They hadn't thought about it." And I said, "I will have it catered, and if Mr. Rockefeller can't afford it, I'd be very happy to pay for 200 finger foods." And that's what I did.

Q: Did they pay it?

MASSEY: No. I paid it. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure. They might have sent a check later. I'm not sure about that. I can't fault them for that.

And the other one was in Africa where I was really very angry because we had a high muckety muck visiting us from Philadelphia. We were told to put out the red carpet. Fine. We gave a dinner for him; we gave a lunch for him. He wanted to be taken about to several ministries but our chauffeur, of course in Africa, had his siesta and he wasn't going to be rooted out at 1:00 in the afternoon, so I drove him. I really did a hell of a lot for him. And the man left without as much as a flower to me, as a letter to me, or anything. He had also given to Parke a wagon full of items to be shipped back to the States. So I said, "Fine. He's gone, he hasn't done a damn thing in return. Let me go through the things." And the two little brass things you see over there I think he collected, about the only two that I thought were pretty. And I kept them as hostess gifts.

Q: Did you get any letter from him saying, "Oh, by the way, there are two little..."

MASSEY: No. He bought so much he wouldn't have known the difference. None of it I

wanted, but that...

Q: What was his, without identifying him, what was his capacity?

MASSEY: Publisher of a newspaper.

PARKE MASSEY: Publisher of a black newspaper.

MASSEY: He was a very important man, and that I didn't like.

Q: Did you or your family have any special health problems?

MASSEY: Well, Parke had developed emphysema, and we found that out in Bolivia, 14,000 feet up. What basically saved his life the embassy doctor told him then and there that if you don't stop smoking you'll be dead. And he said, "We all die." "When?" "Within six months," the man said. And that was that, and he stopped smoking.

Q: My Lord. Was it difficult to stop smoking? Or were you one of the people who could turn it off?

PARKE MASSEY: I was scared off.

MASSEY: Okay, we'll hope that holds true.

Q: Did you ever feel culture shock in any way.

MASSEY: Again, in Africa when our boy came in in these fantastic tribal scars...you know, all over the faces? I just found that shocking. And Parke shocked me by saying, "Remember your brother?" My brother was brought up in Austria and had (inaudible) from dueling scars.

Q: That is very interesting. He had those? That's a shock for me to hear. To hear somebody I actually have talked to had a relative who did that. How did it affect him then in his life, in any way? Is he still alive?

MASSEY: No, he's dead. He was killed. He was a half-brother and much older than I am.

Q: Did he come to the United States, or did he stay...

MASSEY: Oh, yes, he did. He was a doctor, my whole family were doctors. And of course, he was in his (inaudible) dueling.

PARKE MASSEY: Just a form of tribal identification.

Q: Well, I think that was a very interesting comment. Parke immediately came up with

that?

MASSEY: Yes, and I could not argue.

Q: Did you ever resent being the wife of, rather than a person?

MASSEY: Yes, of course you do.

Q: I mean, you're introduced as the wife of.

MASSEY: You said Mrs. Parke Massey, you never asked me my name.

Q: That's interesting because of this feeling that I have. You were a State Department person.

MASSEY: Sure:

Q: I was just coming to that. What is your first name?

MASSEY: Suska.

Q: That's very interesting. That'll take care of me, won't it? What about in Washington? Did you have special reactions to service in Washington? Presumably you didn't have any...

MASSEY: No, I was really left alone and I worked all the eight years we were in Washington.

Q: Did you ever feel lonely or homesick overseas?

MASSEY: No. For what? For whom?

Q: That's interesting. I think you'd say that _____, whatever else we had.

MASSEY: Well, we never had a home. We had no property up there, and we owned nothing until we left the Service.

Q: Oh, really. You didn't have a home at home.

MASSEY: We bought a house finally when we were stationed in Haiti. We bought this little house that you see up there in Light House Point, and then got it up to scratch when we arrived here, and then sold it, and got into this.

Q: That's interesting because the next question asks about your child, and what her reaction was to being in the Foreign Service life. And then I will proceed to ask you about the home business, and I'll get to that in a moment.

MASSEY: Well, she would have to answer that. It may have hurt her in some way. Unfortunately we are estranged. We arrived back in the States...in the first place she was born in Mexico, brought up in Germany, French schools, and then in Africa speaking French and Italian and English finally. We arrived here in the '50s, and with the drug age, and all that hitting us over the head, and unprepared for it, everything went to pieces, and unfortunately they have never recovered from it.

Q: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

MASSEY: We are sorry about that too.

Q: And this is related, you think, to the Foreign Service?

MASSEY: Not necessarily.

Q: It might have happened otherwise in the '60.

MASSEY: It might have happened otherwise, if you have lived abroad and then come into it...I don't know.

Q: I don't know, we have so many friends, and I think the proportion of this type of reaction on the part of children is larger in the Foreign Service. I may be wrong about that.

MASSEY: It's possible because you're completely unprepared. It's a different life.

Q: How did the diplomatic social functions effect you in any way?

MASSEY: I enjoyed them. They also blunted my taste for cocktail parties now. I prefer dinners.

Q: What about money?

MASSEY: What about it?

Q: Did you feel you had any money problems?

MASSEY: Always. No matter how much you have, you have problems.

Q: Yes, well I mean related to the Service. Did you ever feel, for instance, a resentment that the Foreign Service didn't pay you enough as against the people that you were dealing with?

MASSEY: We had so many perks, on the other hand. We were living the good life. We had staffs of servants. We had beautiful houses. No, I don't think I said underprivileged.

Q: Yetta is asking you whether that wasn't taken care of by the servants who were being paid by you personally. Not all of them, were they?

MASSEY: Some were paid.

Q: When you were a Consul General you were entitled to certain servants.

MASSEY: A cook, a butler, and a chauffeur were paid. The gardener too.

Q: What about moving every few years. I can gather from what you said that didn't bother.

MASSEY: No problem.

Q: That relates to the home problem too. You did not have any roots at home. My experience, for instance, is having had a home in the United States which the children looked upon as home, and I would say that moving every few years would have been a great difficulty. We only had two posts, so that is not so much a problem.

MASSEY: I enjoyed it thoroughly each time. Parke was the one who complained at times. It's a terrific challenge to go to a new country, to start finding a new place, to get it to your liking.

Q: Your reaction is wonderful. That's fine. You had your own career when you were here.

MASSEY: For eight years, yes, I worked in Washington.

Q: What about hobbies abroad?

MASSEY: I draw a lot, and I play a lot of bridge. And I've always made it a point of learning the language of the country, and keeping it up. Now I spend time reading French every day, etc. Those are my hobbies, languages.

Q: German too, you still read?

MASSEY: German I speak like English, Spanish too. We were 27 years in Latin America.

Q: Yes, well that's very fortunate. Any other hobbies?

MASSEY: I can't think of any, can you?

Q: Just living the good life, that's your hobby I can see that. How do you feel about some of your posts as against others? Were some more rewarding, less rewarding, more

difficult, less difficult than others?

MASSEY: Difficult for personal reasons, was only Haiti. Mostly because of Parke's job there, and having been stabbed in the back more or less, and having to take a job which he was not prepared for since he was promised the AID directorship there, and deputy didn't interest him, and it certainly depressed me. So it was only that. As far as living is concerned, I loved them all -- Haiti probably less. We had a wonderful life, I can't complain.

Q: Did the political situation in Haiti affect you adversely?

MASSEY: No. It didn't affect us adversely, we were just unhappy to see the conditions, both the people and the animals. I'm an animal lover and the worst things I've ever seen happened to dogs was in Haiti. Horrible. But they're also poor people. You can't blame the people.

Q: The next question is one you have spoken to before we began taping, and that is...the way it is put here on the questionnaire, would you like to talk about the spiritual side of your life? I would rather put it in terms of to what degree you're willing to speak about the spiritual side of life and religious?

MASSEY: What you call religion, I'm anti-religion. Spiritual life? The phrase alone doesn't appeal to me.

Q: Well, did it affect your reaction to the country and the people in which you served, or you lived.

MASSEY: I don't know how that...how would that enter?

Q: For instance, if there was a strong church aspect to the life of the country. Did the fact that you are not religious keep you out of some activities?

MASSEY: No, I don't think so. It's certainly not social and I didn't go to church anyway so if it kept me out of church, but it would do that in any country. So there's no difference.

Q: Okay, how do you feel about salaries for spouses? You know the current situation where spouses are...there's some encouragement.

MASSEY: I haven't thought about it. I don't think it's a bad idea, but that means they should deliver, and they really should be getting a concrete job, not just representation and little things like that. In other words you should find out what the talent is, and give a meaningful job to the wife.

Q: Sure. There is, as you know, a new policy in that regard which I gather you would think is a good idea.

MASSEY: I would be in favor of, indeed.

Q: Were you involved in, or affected, by the women's movement at all in your Service. But I think the interview should indicate that you left the Service in '79 which is before the heyday of the current

MASSEY: That's absolutely right.

Q: Well, we are close to finishing the tape. We also have finished the questionnaire. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

MASSEY: No, I've talked too much and to little purpose, I fear.

Q: Okay. Thank you very much, and I've already put on tape my gratitude to Parke for his willingness, and let me say on behalf of the spousal project I think this was a good opportunity to take advantage of the visit. In the AID field we like to feel as though we take advantage of opportunity, and this was one.

Thank you very much. I've gone almost a half hour beyond my...I told Parke that I would stay no longer than...

MASSEY: As long as he isn't tired that's okay.

Q: Okay, thank you very much.

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Parke D. Massey

Spouse's Position: FSO, State; FSO, AID Mission Director

Spouse Entered Service: 9/1947

Left Service: 12/79

You Entered Service: Same

Left Service: Same

Status: Spouse of Retiree

Posts:

1947-1950 Mexico City, DF, Mexico

1950-1952 Genoa and Rome, Italy

1952-1953 Columbia, University, New York, NY

1953-1956 Bonn, Germany
1957-1959 Abidjan, Ivory Coast
1960-1967 Washington, DC
1967-1970 Managua, Nicaragua
1970-1973 Panama City, Panama
1973-1975 La Paz, Bolivia
1975-1976 Santiago, Chile
1976-1978 Port-au-Prince, Haiti
1978-1979 Montevideo, Uruguay

Place/Date of birth: Vienna, Austria - May 1921

Maiden Name: Klaar

Parents (Name, Profession):

Dr. Joseph Klaar, Physician; Gisela Klaar

Schools (Prep, University): Profession:

Real Gymnasium in Vienna

Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY

Advertising; President and Executive Director of Nonprofit group

Date/Place of Marriage: New York City, 12/19/41

Children:

one daughter, one grand daughter

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:

A At Post: None

B. In Washington, DC: President and Executive Director of Books USA, a nonprofit organization founded by Edward R. Murrow, which distributed American paperbacks overseas via the Peace Corps and USIS

End of interview