The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
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Foreign Service Spouse Series

PAMELA RICHMOND

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INTERVIEW

Q: This is Kristie Miller on May 30, 1991. I am interviewing Pamela Richmond, at her home in Alexandria, Virginia.

You weren't allowed to do the language training as a spouse.

RICHMOND: No.

Q: Was it routinely done for spouses?

RICHMOND: My husband was in USIA, but I was not allowed to do the Russian language training for the Soviet Union. That's really the one I would like to have had.

Q: What year was that?

RICHMOND: It would have been 1967.

Q: When you arrived at post, did some of the other women know how to speak Russian? Or did they want to?

RICHMOND: There were two other women who spoke it. I could speak it too, because I'm Polish, spent 3 1/2 years in Poland. And then I studied with a native speaker of Russian.

Q: You yourself entered the Foreign Service, in 1958. What had been your background? Why did you go into the Foreign Service?

RICHMOND: I had traveled quite a bit after I had graduated from college, in South American and Europe. When I was in South America I got interested in American foreign policy toward Latin America, and my Latin American friends were very critical of that and I could see there was some reason for it. I was interested in having a piece of that and so went to graduate school, at Columbia School of International Relations and got a Master's Degree, in international relations, with a specialty in Latin American studies.

In the Foreign Service, I interviewed with CIA, USIA and State Department. State Department was just beginning to take people again, in fairly large quantities, at that time after years of not hiring much of anybody. So there were four women in my Foreign Service class. It was just the beginning of taking women in, just at that time. Not a lot, but a few.

Q: Well, four in an entering class --

RICHMOND: Right. And one of the standard questions, one that I was asked by my examiners was, did I plan to get married? (she laughs)

Q: "Or are you going to take the veil??"

RICHMOND: I said sure, that I probably would, and that I had just read an article about the British foreign service and that there was very little structure; having women marry and drop out was a normal process of attrition and it didn't ruin people's careers. In my naivete and lack of awareness and consciousness, I decided that that was a good reason for accepting women in the Foreign Service. I look back and I'm embarrassed! But I said, well, if that's a problem, look at it this way, is what I was saying, because I wanted to get into something and USIA was not at the moment taking women -- they took one woman that year and she had been the personal escort of Sukarno when he was in this country, whatever "personal escort" means.

Q: So you joined the State Department?

RICHMOND: Yes, and did the usual introductory course and was assigned to do research, in the Department in INR on South America. And that was very interesting. But I ended up marrying about a year later, while still in DC. The rule was that you had to submit your resignation, but it was not acted upon until my husband accepted an assignment overseas.

Q: So that you could have continued in the State Department had you stayed in Washington.

RICHMOND: That's right.

Q: Why was there that distinction? Have you any idea?

RICHMOND: I think the technicality on which they "got" you, so to speak, in those days was you had to be freely available for assignment anywhere. And I certainly as a newly-wed wasn't willing to be assigned somewhere besides where my husband was. So I continued to work until a few weeks before we left for Poland.

Q: Were you angry about having to resign?

RICHMOND: Well, I don't recall being particularly angry, though I wanted to work. I also planned to raise a family and that seemed like a good solution, too. I only became angry about the whole thing later when I discovered that my letter asking the Ambassador for a possible assignment in the Embassy, which he had said no, there wasn't, and my husband went to the files, in some way, and noticed the letter and saw that the Ambassador, Jake Beam, had written in the margin, "Let her teach school" and that did infuriate me. Especially since I'd been co-opted to be on the school board, and spoke good enough Polish to deal with the local employees and do local business and lived upstairs over the American school. I was the treasurer and disbursed $10,000 worth of funds and took care of all that for a couple of years.

Q: And you felt that with your degree and with your Polish, they could probably have found something else for you to do.

RICHMOND: You would have thought! I didn't know Polish when I went there. I got four lessons but the first year I was there I took private lessons, which I paid for, and by the end of the first year I think I spoke the language and could get around. I could go with the Ambassador's wife - actually, she was a former professional USIA officer, herself. I would go with her sometimes to events where they needed somebody who spoke some Polish. You know, they used me in that way but I never felt taken advantage of and made to do wifely things I did not want to do -- she was a very nice Ambassador's wife and I found that she was very special.

Q: She asked you nicely, it wasn't a command performance.

RICHMOND: No, absolutely not. She was really a very lovely warm woman. I think her graciousness made up for the Ambassador's lack of graciousness; a nice man but purely business.

Q: (laughing) A nice way to put it!

RICHMOND: She was certainly aware -- not a feminist but certainly aware of issues.

Q: How long were you in Poland?

RICHMOND: Three years.

Q: And you were on the school board?

RICHMOND: Yes.

Q: Did you have any other jobs there at post?

RICHMOND: No. I mean, I had a job and then I had two children during those three and a half years, so (both laugh) I found an alternative occupation and that was fine.

Q: Where did you go after that?

RICHMOND: From there we went to Vienna.

Q: Your husband was USIA?

RICHMOND: He was, but in Poland there wasn't a USIA Mission at that time, so he was assigned to the Embassy as Cultural Officer. But in many of the USIA programs, particularly ones involving the cultural exchanges, the USIA officer was with USIA overseas, and in the U.S. was with the State Department because those positions involved disbursement of funds, which was illegal for USIA, so the exchange programs, which he

worked on, were administered domestically by State Department.

Q: Since that was your original interest, did you do a fair amount to support his effort in Poland?

RICHMOND: There was not a lot of formal entertainment responsibility at that time. We were fairly junior. The head of the Cultural section was of Polish origin and had been there for years, knew everybody in town, had a French wife who entertained beautifully, so I was not held responsible for that entertainment; which was just as well, since I had two babies then. Well, I take that back, I did quite a bit in the last year. By then we had a bigger apartment and I had a cook, so we could do some entertaining.

Q: And then you went directly to Vienna?

RICHMOND: Directly to Vienna by train. And it was ironic because I was very much at home in Poland, I spoke pretty good Polish, and although I found the Poles were rather rough in the streets and not overly polite or anything like that, a woman with a child or a pregnant woman was always sent to the head of the line in the shops -- and there were always lines in the shops. And even if you had the time, and felt sorry for the Poles who had to stand in line, they would push you to the front of the line. On a personal basis, I always felt that anywhere in Poland people would be there to help you and treat you fairly and nicely. And of course I was surprised in Poland to find out that it was a Catholic country, even though I thought it was a (she laughs) Communist country. And it was a wonderful experience to spend some time there.

Q: Are you Catholic?

RICHMOND: No. But from the little I knew about Poland, which was not a lot before I went, I had the impression that it was a Communist country, and in a way it was a Communist country but it was overwhelmingly Catholic.

And everybody in Poland had a relative in the United States, and I remember taking some friends on a tour in Warsaw -- many of the country houses were of logs with new doors and courtyards, quite charming -- and we walked in with this man who was an architect and just enchanted by this village courtyard. We stopped and got out and walked into the courtyard, and saw someone scurrying around a corner, and then everything was empty. We looked around, then were about to leave when a little man came out and introduced himself and I introduced our guests and myself, and said we were Americans. And "Oh!" He said, "do you know my cousin in Cleveland too??" (both laugh) We said unfortunately we didn't but it was wonderful that he had a cousin in Cleveland, and my friend had a cook for many years who was of Polish origin and talked about her; of course he didn't speak English.

We started to leave and he said, "No no, wait." And his wife, also elderly, came scurrying out, carrying a tray -- this was late Spring -- with six apples. A relative of the golden delicious called a Reneta with a little bit of freckles on the side, and they were slightly

shriveled: they'd been sitting carefully on a shelf all winter long. We thanked them profusely and took the apples. Oh no, we have to eat them! So we stood and talked and ate our apples before we could leave. They were fabulous. But that was the general tone. If you were an American in Poland, people were extremely friendly. That part was a pleasure.

Q: Was there any official anti-Americanism or coldness toward the Americans?

RICHMOND: No. It was a period, rather, when Nixon came to Poland and was received so well after his election. They still of course tapped phones and they compromised. My husband and my neighbor downstairs, very sad, a traumatic moment. I realized later that I had walked in at the moment when she was confronting him with a letter she had received saying he was having an affair with someone... It was really very sad, very sad.

Vienna, on the other hand, I thought, you know, center of Western civilization, practically American, it would be wonderful, I'm looking forward to it. And I suffered real culture shock.

Q: You know (she laughs) I think that's quite common.

RICHMOND: It was so unnerving. The Viennese were very formal. You had to dress properly, you had to have a title, and you certainly never took your children anywhere. And there I was with my rundown Polish clothes, two, sort of, snot-nosed kids, in tow, and everybody treated me like a kinderschwester, and they'd pass right past me in the line and go to Frau Doktor and Frau whatever, and my German was zilch.

Q: You had no training, there was no post language or anything?

RICHMOND: No. I did manage to have four lessons in German at the house --

Q: Again, paid for by you.

RICHMOND: Yes, I think so. That was while I was living in the Embassy, downtown. Then we moved out to a private apartment in Grinzing and it was just not possible. I couldn't get a babysitter, couldn't get household help, it was very difficult. And I felt badly treated, I mean treated like dirt --

Q: By the Austrians.

RICHMOND: By the Austrians, who were wonderfully polite on the street and had all this wonderful language but could have cared less. In contrast to the Poles, who were rather rough on the outside but who I always found had hearts of gold. And of course there are lovely Austrians, but the general -- if you were very well-dressed, had no children, you did a whole lot better, especially if you arrived the first time in a limousine. We used to joke about that. (both laugh) And had a friend come in with you and call you Frau Doktor. (more laughter) We actually did it once.

Q: And did it help a lot?

RICHMOND: Oh, yes.

Q: Now, tell me about your scam when you were trying to get people to --

RICHMOND: When the junior Officer's wife moved out to the area, we decided that was the way to go. She arrived at the shops dressed to kill... but it didn't really seem to help: it was sort of by way of revenge.

Q: Did you get any training before you went out to Poland and any kind of orientation course or anything like that?

RICHMOND: No. I did have four private Polish lessons.

Q: Paid for by you?

RICHMOND: You know, I don't remember. I think probably so because he came to the house, it was the same man my husband was studying with. But USIA did not pay for lessons for spouses, so I could say [speaking Polish] "where is the toilet" and "what time does the train leave for Warsaw?" and a few other things when I arrived. It's amazing I can still say that! That's a long time, and a lot of languages later.

Q: That's what makes a big difference. So, now you're in Vienna, what year is this?

RICHMOND: 1961 to '63. Then we came back to the States.

Q: I assume that in Vienna since you didn't have any help and had small children, you didn't have much time to do anything else.

RICHMOND: I had trouble even going to official things. My husband's job was not intrinsic to the Embassy, it was liaison with the Eastern European posts, so it didn't have an operational responsibility within Austria, so we didn't have those kinds of responsibilities. We entertained only occasionally. But it was a very difficult time because I was used to having a household full of help.

My daughter, who was three and a half or four, was very attached to a Polish nanny that we had and the change was very upsetting. One of my children, the second one, is handicapped and was still waking up and screaming at nights, so my sleep was interrupted. It was very difficult, it was the hardest time for me personally. I was very isolated, wasn't living in the Embassy compound. The Embassy housing where some people lived was very unsuitable for me and the children because it had stairs and balconies and it just wouldn't have done. Anyway, it was a very difficult experience despite the cultural life.

Q: It sounds to me you got very little chance to appreciate it if you were --

RICHMOND: Not a lot, although just being up on the mountainside and you could hear the {inaudible] from the terrace, and there were (?) all around, we could go sledding out the back door --

Q: And then you came back to the States?

RICHMOND: Yes, and bought a house and had another baby and settled in to finish up the last two courses. I had one course I had never finished for my Master's degree. And got my children started in school and ended up as treasurer of the pre-school where my children went, and joined the Martha's Road "kibbutz." I had never had a group of women with children and it was wonderful for me to live on a cul-de-sac where there were eight to ten families with young children. It was not lonely and alone, and there was support that was really good.

Q: I like that "Martha's Road kibbutz." (she laughs)

RICHMOND: Well, a lot of them were Jewish and one of them had a knack of coining a phrase, she really named it, and she was right -- it really served that way. When my youngest was two or three months old - he was born just after we came back and I was quite heavy, having eaten too much Vienna schlag or something. A couple of months after his birth I was feeling kind of bottled up and I called her up to scream. "Oh," she said, "just bring the kids over and go to New York for the weekend." It was that kind of openness and willingness to help that I had not had just because of the isolation of living overseas.

Q: And there hadn't been anything like that in Poland either?

RICHMOND: No. And in Poland I had my first baby and brought the baby home after four or five days, and one of the neighbors said in the clinic that she was the first American baby to be born in Warsaw for many, many years. Before then everybody had flown out. I chose not to, and there I was, alone in my apartment, couldn't go downstairs, no washing machine, nobody to do diapers. The first baby (laughing) literally slept in the drawer because not all the things that we ordered had come. And there were very few other very young children. Not that people weren't friendly but there just wasn't a network. Being in that kind of community back here was really wonderful.

Q: So you were able, because you had some good support, to go to school and finish your degree.

RICHMOND: Well, that was just one course, so that was not a problem. But I got involved, again in education, and eventually went back to school at night for a number of education courses and decided that I could secure a Master's in education. Not enough substance there. If there was substance, I didn't find it in the courses despite all this "education."

Q: You wanted to go to the schools but not in the classrooms.

RICHMOND: I got involved as a volunteer tutoring and ended up getting assigned to these students, foreign language students. But I had meanwhile worked as an aide in kindergarten class and done a lot of other things

Q: Was it because of your overseas experience that you got involved in ESL (English as a second language)?

RICHMOND: Although I'd taught ESL to adults in Poland at the time, I think it was primarily because I had tutored the Korean kids and because, I think, it was recognizable that I was a person who could figure out how to do things and was self-directed.

Q: So, while your kids were little you were doing a lot of volunteer work in the schools.

RICHMOND: And toying around with going into teaching -- there was a little opposition there, somewhere.

Q: Because of that letter?

RICHMOND: I don't know, I just wonder. Then we went overseas again, in 1967 to the Soviet Union, to Moscow.

Q: And did you have any training before you went? You started out by saying no, that you hadn't had any language training.

RICHMOND: That's right. For whatever reason language training was not available to me.

Q: Did you get any other kind of orientation?

RICHMOND: I took one or two private lessons a week not too far from my home, which was much more convenient, and actually probably as much as I could stomach. Six hours a day, you know, with young children, you can't do it.

Q: But now they do have a program for people -- I was in your situation when my husband went overseas the last time, and they allowed me to arrange classes on my schedule. They paid for the babysitter and for the lessons.

RICHMOND: Well, that certainly was not available. But I knew the importance of knowing the language, so I took private lessons, used the books they were using in the class at the Embassy, and went part-time. That was really right for me because I can generally deal with languages, more in less time, and I had the background in Polish, which helps even though it confuses. It has about 50% cognates. I had a foothold in

Slavic grammar.

Q: Did they give you any other training about the culture in the Soviet Union or the problems you might face?

RICHMOND: Not to my recollection. (both laugh) And then my husband said he had to go early because they needed him. We had just bought a new house, so I had to renovate that and rent it, I had to sell the other house and get the house packed up -- some in storage, some for overseas.

Q: And three children under ten?

RICHMOND: Like nine, seven and almost four.

Q: How much ahead did your husband go?

RICHMOND: Two and a half months.

Q: That must have been tough.

RICHMOND: Yeah. Then finally we went, and thank God for neighbors again who'd give you breakfast and dispose of the old mattresses we'd been sleeping on, on the floor, the last couple of nights after the furniture was all gone (laughing) and took you to the airport with all your kit and kaboodle. Including the little BOAC bag with the little cage in it with two tame mice. (KM laughing heartily) Then we went to Finland and stayed for four or five days to interview a nanny to go in.

Q: The idea being that a Russian nanny would be suspect?

RICHMOND: They were just not available. Imported help was the way to go. I and three kids had a week in Finland and played with mice. We were a great success in Moscow! And we arrived. Later, of course, my husband said, "Well, you know the reason they needed me is so everybody else could go on vacation." But he was always the best sport, did what the boss wanted.

Q: I always wonder what they do when these guys are single. I mean, half of the Foreign Service is single now. Who renovates the houses when they don't have the wife to stay home and do it? There must be an awful lot more "give" than they thought there was. Did that irritate you, that he left?

RICHMOND: Oh! Somehow I tolerated it then better than looking back. When I discovered, when he finally told me, as it turned out, that the reason he was needed to go -- and actually he had done this once before - was so that everybody else could go on vacation, then I was furious.

Q: But your life was being made difficult in order to --

RICHMOND: And then he could have said no, but he didn't know how to say no to the boss and so it was important. Anyway, it was an adventure. (both laugh) You look back and wonder how you did it, I'm sure.

Q: How did you like the Soviet Union?

RICHMOND: It was a fascinating place to be. We were there just two years. The first year things had liberalized to some extent. There were more cultural things to see and do at that point but the invasion of Czechoslovakia came during the summer between the two years. That sort of put things on hold for a while. Even after that, in the provinces you still, if you travelled, found that people were reasonably open. You couldn't pursue friendships on an ongoing basis in Moscow. People were approached and had to cooperate with the KGB. And I finally did get Russian lessons on post.

Q: Finally; this being the third post you were at.

RICHMOND: Yes. I did get language lessons. Sometimes individual, sometimes with another wife who was quite a linguist. Between us we were wonderful, because she could read anything and I could speak quite a lot. I always read like a first-grader, I had to sound everything out. And the Russian teacher was a very interesting woman and of course had to report to the KGB. She knew that I knew she had to, and she knew that I knew that she knew. There was an understanding. And so periodically she would ask a question and I would say to her, "Gee, I haven't any idea."

Q: Your eyes sparkling at each other the while.

RICHMOND: And she would be quite relieved and partly embarrassed that she had to ask these questions, but she knew that I understood. And she had connections with the film industry and would get us tickets to shows from time to time, which was always very interesting. And was a personal friend. That was about the only kind of personal friend you could have. She was a very interesting woman, and for me it was particularly appealing because she and one other Russian employee at the Embassy, and then the cook, all had children in the first grade and my middle child -- the one who is learning-disabled -- was in first grade. Those three happened to have children in first grade and so we traded first-grade stories with one another that year. And the first-grade experience was really very difficult for all those children. It turned out that one of them -- the Russian teacher's son -- was learning-disabled too--dyslexic-- but there was no diagnosis or recognition of that; so he had a hard time.

Q: Well, how was it discovered?

RICHMOND: A few years later, I think. When he still wasn't doing well but was obviously an intelligent boy, he got some specialized tests.

Q: You kept in touch with them?

RICHMOND: Not very closely, but my husband went back on negotiations a number of times and did see her.

Q: They weren't all at the same school, were they?

RICHMOND: No, they were all in different schools. It was a big change for a Russian child going to first grade, a big event, very demanding. All four children were boys. It was very difficult for all of them.

Q: How was the American school?

RICHMOND: It was wonderful. They had a principal whose wife taught first grade. She had a young baby at home, she always looked tired but she still [inaudible]. And she had 20 children in this tiny little classroom, three of whom had serious problems -- one was hyperactive, another one had a hearing problem, and then there was my son who by the middle of the year had not learned to read and they kept him behind a year.

Q: You already knew that he had some learning trouble.

RICHMOND: Yeah, that he was developmentally slow in some ways, and so we didn't know how he'd do. And my sister had sent me some magnetic letters. I had done volunteer work but I was not into teaching reading or anything at that time, it was only later that I did some of that. I started, she taught me to put letters on the icebox, over Christmas vacation I did that.

And he did pretty well at that. And I knew he knew his sounds long before he knew his letters, he knew sounds from kindergarten. So his teacher gave us his first primer, and said he was supposed to be able to read it.

So I took it home and we sat down on the couch every afternoon to read it and he'd look at the picture and say, “I don't know that word.” I'd say, “So why don't you look at it?” “Tim!” He'd turn the page and he'd talk about the picture and I'd say, “What does this say?” and he'd say, “I don't know,” I'd say, “Why don't you look at it,” “Well, 'ride.'” I'd get him focused, he knew it. We read that book, I think for three weeks, after which he could read it with great nuance and enthusiasm and delight. And then I sat him down with his father to read it in the afternoon before going to one of the myriad cocktail parties. And then we went back to the next book, and by March he was caught up with the rest of the school, with the rest of his class, but he ruined my ski vacation because he really wanted to do his reading lesson that day. And he knew all the lessons by heart, he'd heard everyone reading aloud all year, so it was easy for him to read.

And then the teacher started sending him down to read to her husband the principal, which he did. I mean, it was that kind of school, very nice atmosphere and he would go regularly during the week to read to the principal, which I thought was the best reason to go to the principal anyway.

Q: That's just great.

RICHMOND: There was a new principal the next fall. The first week of school I met the new principal and she said, "Oh, you're Mrs. Richmond, you're Sammy's mother." I said, "Yeah," She said, well, Sammy came to read to me yesterday. (hearty laughter) That's what principals are for, right? He had taken his book, walked out of the classroom, and gone down and sat down in her office and said, "I'm here to read to you, Mrs. Vincent."

Q: Was Mrs. Vincent cool enough to appreciate that honor?

RICHMOND: She absolutely was.

Q: That's lovely, because I'm sure at a post like that having a good school must make a huge difference. How about the isolation that I always imagine you'd feel in Moscow? Was that a problem?

RICHMOND: I didn't feel that. I did a lot of things locally. I took the kids to the local playgrounds, slide on the ice, I'd play tennis, sometimes with Russians. There were several men who played good tennis, and we were able to get games with the locals. And we'd go skiing and sledding on the banks of the Moscow. We nearly lost a neighbor's child, well, the sled went in, the kid rolled off. Scary. We went riding at the hippodrome, we went to the big Moscow baths. My daughter was in Russian music school, learned to play the flute, and that was very interesting, she got passed a secret note by some crazy man one time.

Q: What did the secret note say?

RICHMOND: It was crazy. I didn't know, I couldn't read the handwriting but I put it in my daughter's boot in the lady's room, took it back to the Embassy, gave it to someone, that was the extent of the intrigue. But I would sit there and wait and talk to the other parents, the grandfathers who would bring their kids to the Russian Music School. It was the leading Russian music school for kids. The usual program was four days a week, you'd do chorus one day, a wind instrument, a string instrument, you also had a piano, and then you had ear training. My daughter didn't want to do the chorus, although she loved singing, I don't know why she didn't want to, maybe it was just too much, but she did the ear training, and I went to that the first half of the year before... because my undergraduate degree is in music. I went to that with her, and translated for her and helped her do the stuff at home until she got going, and then she went by herself. The flute teacher spoke a little bit of English, not much, but it worked fine. She got a (inaudible) at the end of the year, at a public concert, where we would all stand up. It was a nice experience. So I felt as though there was a lot to do, there were a lot of good museums, and I did my duty from time to time, entertaining political figures.

Q: But it wasn't onerous?

RICHMOND: Well, I didn't find it onerous. I felt as though what was asked of me was very reasonable. I could get a little nervous. One day I was asked to take the wife of Senator Thor(?) and Brooklyn (?), very outstanding ladies in their own right, one a lawyer, oh, and Claiborne Pell's wife, to Leningrad for the day, so I packed a picnic with hot coffee and everything else and picked them up in an Embassy car at five in the morning and went to the airport. And of course the system there is that the airplanes are all housed in the province and flights to Moscow come to Moscow in the morning and they depart in the afternoon, probably for security reasons, but that's how it works. But they couldn't take off from Leningrad because there was a whiteout. So we waited at the airport a couple of hours. Thank God I had cake Dundee that I had taught my cook to make, and coffee, all the goodies, because the food was good there, we had plenty of food. In fact my friends who were stationed in India would stop by on the way and buy goodies from the farmers market, meat and stuff, and freeze it and take it to India on the way back from the States.

Anyway, we sat at the airport for a couple of hours, and had a nice breakfast, and finally I said, "We are not waiting any longer, we are going to go and do something nice today." And I ended up taking them to a gallery which of course was wonderful for them, and then I had read a book by a young American lawyer who had been studying in the Soviet Union and had written a book about the legal system, and I decided it would be fun to go to court. And I knew where there was a court since one of them was a lawyer herself, so I took them into court, where I'd never been before, and we just walked in and plopped ourselves down and observed a couple of cases. I translated the best I could. It was fascinating, and I think they were very interested, and it worked out beautifully.

Q: It sounds like a unique experience that they would never have been able to have ordinarily.

RICHMOND: Well, the courts are open.

Q: But who would think to do it, and be able to translate

RICHMOND: So that kind of thing was fun.

Q: So you didn't have too much to do, and you more or less enjoyed what you did have to do?

RICHMOND: Well, my husband was the head of the cultural section, the information section, and so theoretically I had the responsibilities for the arts. We entertained, I guess it was Michigan, one of the big midwestern universities' band toured the Soviet Union. By the time they arrived back, they were just wonderful. We went to the concert and they all came back to our big apartment for hamburgers, their first good food in three weeks! And my cook and I had been making hamburger rolls and hamburgers for days on end. We served about a hundred people hamburgers, and the local snack bar cook made a mean pizza, and so there was pizza. That was great.

Q: But that sounds like a lot of work, too.

RICHMOND: Oh, yes. We wives, of course, were still being evaluated formally on our husbands' efficiency reports at that point. When I discovered that was happening some years before, I was quite furious about that, too.

Q: Why, exactly? Not that I disagree with you, but I'd like to get it articulated.

RICHMOND: Well, without having my consciousness raised in any formal way, I felt that ... Number one, I wasn't being paid. And I was not an employee, what right did they have to evaluate me?

Q: People are now realizing that the '72 Directive, which reversed that, did nothing actually to solve the problem, because while women were no longer evaluated, they still, really, had to do the work, because the work had to be done. I think there's a lot of feeling now that there needs to be another directive or other legislation. Do you feel that women should be paid, or that the spouses should be paid for the kind of work that you did?

RICHMOND: [pause] That reminds me of an insurance circular that came around years ago when I was just back from overseas, one of those brochures that comes in the mail, and it advertised insurance. You should buy insurance in case something happened to your wife, you would be guaranteed, I think it was, $1.64 an hour to replace your wife's services. We laughed a little bit about it, but that was such an affront, but the reason I think of that story is that you can imagine what they would pay women, if they ever paid women, to do that kind of work. There is no way to adequately compensate a person with advanced degrees and expertise in languages for domestic work, adequately, because in our society we do not pay for women's work. The pay for women's work, I mean, if you had to hire a caterer, you would pay more. But otherwise they are going to pay at the level of women's work and it is not adequate. think a big justice was done in providing for women to have a share in the retirement, in case of divorce or whatever, which is some recognition, though not much, of what women do.

Q: My husband used to actually say, when I baulked at doing something, "Get out there and earn your pension."1

RICHMOND: Well, mine felt I didn't deserve the pension, it was his, and he wanted me to forego all of the pension in the divorce.

Q: That must have made you furious.

RICHMOND: Of course it made me furious. And even then it wasn't adequate, because a lot of our time in the Foreign Service, he had some time before we married, and then he retired, so the years we were married during the time he was in the Foreign Service were not that long. Out of a thirty year marriage it was only 19 years.

Q: Yes, but I think it specifies that 10 years is adequate.

RICHMOND: Well, it was 19 years. That was substantial. I wouldn't think about it, I didn't feel guilty, but I think a lot of women would have Said, "OK."

Q: What was his rationale, if I may ask?

RICHMOND: For years he negotiated with the Russians, and with his brother's coaching, he was being hardened. And I was divorcing him, and he said, "When you negotiate with the Russians... " and I said, "I am not the Russians, dear." And that was the end of it. [inaudible]

Q: You mean he was just giving it a whirl, to see if it would work?

RICHMOND: No, I think he was very serious about that, like I didn't deserve any more.

Q: That's amazing. It seems to me, I can hardly imagine anything more hurtful than to say that your work for 19 years wasn't worth anything.

RICHMOND: Even $1.64 an hour. I worked without pay as treasurer of several schools and I was also on the school board in Moscow, but I never felt called upon in a command-performance way to stand up and salute and wear white gloves. I was called upon to do things that were appropriate to my interests. I always felt respected. I think the ambassadors' wives, lovely women, provided leadership and some organization for the community without making us jump through hoops. And they needed help.

Q: Oh, if we didn't help them, if the junior wives didn't help them, they really wouldn't have been able to do the jobs they were trying to do.

RICHMOND: I probably didn't do that much.

Q: As you say, you were doing the things that were appropriate. Somebody had to work on the school board, too. Maybe not everybody, not that many people at all, would have been in a position to do that well.

RICHMOND: Anyway. So I never taught.

Q: She says with a big smile! [laughs] So after you left Moscow, that was in '69.

RICHMOND: Well, that was very interesting, I came home on home leave and then we were told we weren't going back. All our stuff was there, everything.

Q: Was there a political reason?

RICHMOND: Yes.

Q: There or here?

RICHMOND: I will tell this story and then I'll check with my husband to see if he wants it on tape at this point, but it really needs to be told. The head of USIA visited Moscow, with staff and people from the Embassy in a hotel room, he made a statement to the effect that, he was critical of the Embassy staff, and said that the role of the Embassy was to overthrow the government of the Soviet Union. And my husband said, "No, sir, that is not the role of the U.S. government. And he was axed as being, not understanding the Congress."

Q: This was in '69?

RICHMOND: This was in '69. So instead of going back he was assigned to the War College. It was really very hard on his career and I think he was very depressed about it. It was very hard on the whole family. The ambassador's wife, and probably a couple of other embassy wives, God bless her, I know she personally helped pack up our stuff. But we were six months here without anything. We had to sell that car over there. We had to buy cars here, we didn't have any clothes. We had to break our lease. Actually, we sublet our house which we had been renting to a former neighbor while she was on vacation, and we found out during those three weeks that we were here that we were going to have to stay. So we found her a house in the community and moved her out, and had our things. . . It was that kind of thing.

Q: But you must have taken a financial loss on having to do all of this stuff.

RICHMOND: I don't think it was too bad in the long run. But it was certainly a blow to my husband. I can't say as I blame him. He certainly said the right thing, but probably he shouldn't have said anything for his own personal life, but he was so appalled at the thought that the Soviets were hearing high American officials say this that he just couldn't. I mean, he is a man of considerable principle. And so he put his neck on the chopping block. Anyway, that was very hard on his career.

Q: The War College, is that here in DC?

RICHMOND: Yes.

Q: So you were able to live here?

RICHMOND: So we stayed here in limbo for a year and then he was reassigned to the Department.

Q: At USIA?

RICHMOND: Yes, I think it was. He went back and forth. It was a difficult time from then on with USIA.

Q: Because of this political problem?

RICHMOND: I don't know the ins and outs, but it was probably not an easy place to work.

Q: But he was able to go into the State Department?

RICHMOND: He was in the State Department for part of the time, working on the exchange programs, and doing negotiations and cultural exchanges...

Q: So how long did you stay in Washington?

RICHMOND: Well, then we never went overseas again.

Q: Was that his choice? Or was that partly the fallout. .?

RICHMOND: No, the cloud cleared eventually, we could have gone overseas again, but the child with education problems would have been difficult, and then he became ill and had some medical problems which made it very scary to have gone overseas. I would not have gone overseas again.

Q: Because you needed to take care of him?

RICHMOND: I thought that was very important, the whole education, and I tried to cope with that, for this child, particularly.

Q: Yes, you couldn't exactly go back to doing magnets on the refrigerator when he was 15. He needed something more specialized.

RICHMOND: Yes. So that was that. Anyway.

Q: And then when were you divorced?

RICHMOND: It's been about three years now.

Q: So you stayed here for quite a while?

RICHMOND: We stayed here. He retired, I think, in '85 (?) and he did contract work, he's written some books. And I went back to school and got a degree in marriage and family therapy and became a counsellor.

Q: Did you do that because of some of your experiences?

RICHMOND: I did it really, I got interested because, after working as a volunteer and training tutors, my position was cut with the county and I went home to teaching as a [inaudible], teaching recorder and cello and stuff. I went back to doing that and then kids started showing up at my door and saying, "So-and-so says you'll help me with my math,

help me with my reading," neighborhood kids began coming to me for tutoring, essentially, I was teaching right around the corner. I became, without ever intending to become, a full-time tutor as well as a teacher of music. And I began to get a number of students who had other problems. One was clearly being abused, others were caught up in the family dynamics in some way, had some behavioral problems secondary to a learning disability, some trauma in the family at home. I work pretty well with parents, I work pretty well with children, but I didn't feel comfortable working with parents and children together, I knew that. A lot of times the problem was helping the child who had some difficulty but was now able to manage by themselves take over the responsibility for being in charge of their own schoolwork, for that you need to work together, that would be ideal. And I had read about an approach to psychotherapy developed in part by Milton Ayres, a psychiatrist, a therapist, realized there was a way to do therapy that was effective, not that he was a family therapist. I discovered that, and here's where the Foreign Service experience was a huge boon to me, twenty years before that I had met a social worker whose sociologist husband was the first Fulbright exchange professor in Warsaw. There she arrived with two little children and an American nanny and no cornflakes! And the Embassy policy did not permit non-Embassy personnel to use the commissary. They were sticky about it, so I said, "What do you need?" And I bought cornflakes and whatever else, and took care of that for her. We had seen these people occasionally, they had moved to Philadelphia, and that was the end of that, it had been 17 years, and I discovered she was back in town. I called her up to have lunch, and it turned out she had a training program to train people in family therapy. I went to observe, and instead of staying half an hour I stayed eight hours. And she said, "You know, you could do this." And I said, "Fine, I will do it." And she took me on. This was Mary Ann Walters, she's famous, one of the leading family therapists in the United States, and who is a staunch feminist. And so she took me into her program with no previous formal background and after that I went to school. First I learned how to do it, and then I went to school to get the credentials. It's like the little boy and the watermelon. He had to run around back of the barn and eat one first before he could take the bet about whether or not he could eat a watermelon. [laughter] I had to learn how to do it before I could decide that I could do it.

Q: That's interesting. I think one of the things that's good about these tapes is to see how people have moved beyond being a Foreign Service spouse into a new career.

RICHMOND: Well, the way I have moved is backwards. I think I've gone through every door backwards. You know, unintentionally and circumstantially. But what I find is that things come together. What I learned teaching music, and doing music, what I learned tutoring, what I learned as a linguist, as a therapist, they all come together. I use everything. Therapy is wonderful in that way, of course, you never know everything and you have the background. I've worked with people of other cultures and I think I can do that as well as anybody, just because I've had that experience, I make some adjustments and find out where they are coming from in a cultural sense. And some of it is teaching.

Q: I think this is great. Is anything else that you'd like to have on the record from your Foreign Service experience? Anything else, any other observations?

RICHMOND: Well, I certainly haven't gone into all the medical trauma I experienced in the Foreign Service, all those difficulties.

Q: When you were overseas?

RICHMOND: Yeah. I mean, with my second child who was born with a [inaudible] an exchange transfusion at birth, there was a Polish doctor who did the transfusion who had just finished training in the United States and knew how to do it. Nobody else in Poland knew how to do it, and he had the kind of tubing that you could use to do it. And we were told by doctors back here that he survived in part because of the incredibly good neonatal care that he'd gotten. But then we went through other trauma, people wanting -- another Polish doctor who had studied in the States and had just come back wanted to give him thyroid treatment which was then being used with children with Mongolism, because they thought maybe he was a Downs' syndrome baby. And I knew just enough to know that you don't give thyroid unless there is a thyroid deficiency. My medical education began when I was learning how to manage, as an amateur. It's a challenge, even in the States, it's a challenge, to learn how to get what you need medically and to be an alert consumer, and it's just that much more complicated overseas. And so we had to fly him home. I came home and stayed in Boston for a month while he was hospitalized. And they had just learned how to do a chromosome count, to do a culture and have a gene split, to do a chromosome count and to diagnose Downs' syndrome, or an atypical Downs' syndrome. And that was very traumatic for me because we had to wait two weeks for the results because they said if it came out positive they would have to re-do it, just to be sure. So after two weeks they said, "Well, we have to re-do it, but it's not that it's positive." It's hard to believe, especially when the social worker is telling me, "Well, you know you're going to have to institutionalize this baby." So you think about being resigned to that kind of ... [inaudible]

Q: But there you were in the States, probably without your husband, having to do all this on your own.

RICHMOND: That's right. I was staying with his family who were [inaudible] and very supportive. But that was traumatic. They had hospitalized him, at least in Poland when they hospitalized him he was used to round-the-clock care, always being held by one Polish woman or myself.

Q: And you weren't allowed to stay?

RICHMOND: And I wasn't allowed to be there except in certain hours of the day. It was traumatic. For some months later, I'd wake up crying because of that experience, he would wake up terrified and scream.

Q: I just think that's brutal.

RICHMOND: I don't know how I. ..I'm fairly tough. I mean, after two days he wouldn't

sleep, they couldn't do an EKG so they called me so he finally went to sleep. Cruel. Cruel.

Q: It is.

RICHMOND: And of course it was a shock to me because he was in with all kinds of seriously handicapped kids -- that vision -- of where they grouped him was very suggestive also, so it was a very hard time. And it could have happened in this country, I mean, he could have had the same problems in this country.

Q: But I'm sure it was more traumatic because your other kids were there, and you were in, not in your own home.

RICHMOND: Well, I knew my daughter was being well-cared for, we had a lovely Polish nanny and my husband was very devoted to the kids when they were little, so...But despite all the difficulties, we just went on treating him like any other kid and he continued to gradually catch up and has done very well, but no one really knows whether this other rather serious and ongoing medical problem might be related to the exchange transfusion or not.

Q: It might have been something that was not properly done?

RICHMOND: No, it would have been something in the transfused blood that sensitized him to develop a tighter (?) antibody which attaches to his blood cells and causes his system to destroy them. It's an autoimmune process that may very well have been due to the transfusion, although it's hard to know. But that was very traumatic and then wondering what school. But as it turned out, he did go to the little school in Moscow; was perfectly good. It gave him the most incredibly positive start that any school experience could have done.

Q: Did you feel that the level of care for American Foreign Service people overseas was adequate, or do you think of that as a problem for Foreign Service families?

RICHMOND: Well, except that the British doctor in Warsaw was known as a quote-unquote Christian scientist and that did not...[laughter]. That's sort of a nasty way. But he sort of looked at you from across the room, and said, "Well, you look OK." And I had a terrible breast infection after the second child and he managed to go out of town and I went to a Polish doctor. I was really delirious and had a very high fever and had been untreated and this guy did cure me. I don't know if anyone in the States would do this, but he actually used a horse syringe to aspirate the abscess and to pumped antibiotics. No anesthetic, thank you very much!

Q: I think that's a not very publicized but very widespread feature of Foreign Service life is that the medicine is usually not what you would get at home and it can be very traumatic.

RICHMOND: Well, I had had no experience, of course, so I have nothing to compare it with. Certainly the two deliveries I had in Poland, the first one was really hilarious almost. I went into labor and went into the hospital in late afternoon and the British doctor showed up and my Polish obstetrician was a man and my husband, and they all -- there was nobody else in the clinic -- it was empty because the Poles all have their babies in June, and this was in December, nobody in Poland has a baby in December, it's just not done -- and the story was that this obstetrician was selected because he was the first Polish obstetrician approached who didn't first try for an abortion. He was a lovely guy, who delivered my first baby. But the three of them sat around in this room while I'm in labor, talking, smoking, drinking tea, and paying no attention to me! Finally when it got to the second stage, they kind of got themselves together and took me upstairs to the delivery room and delivered the baby. So my husband got to be there, which was fine for him. But it was rather (?). But certainly personal. Not that three guys sitting around talking did too much...

The wife of the first obstetrician was also an obstetrician, and she delivered the second baby. She would run in, check me, and then run out and listen to Maurizio Pollini, who was playing in the finals of the Chopin competition. Come in and report and then run out again.

Q: You were also interested?

RICHMOND: Well, actually I was, you know. Years later I heard him play, and that's what I could think of, this delivery.

Q: Now was she the one who did the transfusion?

RICHMOND: Two young doctors who worked with her are the ones that did it, so it was fortuitous. She had the right connections and they did a beautiful job. They did as good a job, in the sense of being attentive and careful. ..it was a new procedure, even in the States at that time, he had an ABO incompatibility. So in a sense, the kind of exchange programs that my husband worked on probably contributed to my son's life being saved.

Q: How amazing!

RICHMOND: Isn't that interesting? So, we need to finish up.

***

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Yale W. Richmond (divorced)

Spouse entered service: 1957 Left service: 1980
You entered service: 1958 Left service:

Status: FSO, Tandem spouse (briefly), Spouse of FSO (USIA), Spouse of Retiree

Posts
Pamela C. Richmond
Feb 1959-July 1959 Washington, DC

Yale W. Richmond
Germany, Laos, Columbia University, NYC prior to 1957)
1957-1958 Washington, DC
1958-1961 Warsaw, Poland
1961-1963 Vienna, Austria
1963-1967 Washington, DC
1967-1969 Moscow, USSR
1969-retirement Washington, DC

Spouse's position: USIA Cultural Information Officer; Cultural Counselor (Moscow)

Place/Date of birth: St. Augustine, Florida, 1932

Maiden Name: Pamela Cheatham

Schools: Smith College BA, Columbia University MIA, MS

Date/Place of Marriage: Arlington, Virginia 1958

Profession: Counselor

Children: Three grown

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:
At Post: Treasurer and Board member, Anglo-American School Warsaw; Board Member, Anglo-American School, Moscow

In Washington DC: Many school related; currently Counselor in private practice

End of interview