

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

MARGARET SULLIVAN

*Interviewed By: Jewell Fenzi
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Q: This is Jewell Fenzi and I'm interviewing Margaret Sullivan, Mrs. Daniel Sullivan, at her home in Mclean, Virginia. Our topic this morning will be primarily FSO spouses use of the '72 directive.

SULLIVAN: It in effect said that wives didn't have to entertain for their husbands, that they couldn't be considered a part of the agreement, and that we were private persons. The other side of the equation wasn't addressed and it created, in its way -- it created as many problems as it solved, and maybe some more complicated problems than it solved. It said that senior wives couldn't order junior wives around. It freed the senior wives to a degree, technically. In practical fact the parties were still given, the husbands didn't take up organizing them although sometimes their secretaries did, but if secretaries did, they got paid for it. It said nothing about the fact that a wife in Freetown, a senior wife -- also a bad term -- but the wife of a senior officer, who didn't turn up regularly at the diplomatic wives meetings, which we called the Dippy Dames and which I thought was a pretty appropriate name for it, that somehow this created all kinds of waves within the diplomatic community, and it created problems for our husbands. So that if you wanted to do something on your own, you had to figure out ways of doing what you wanted to do and what the job needed, and to be a parent at the same time. It was a world of horror stories. It was also a world of great women and to tell it only as horror stories is wrong.

But here we were left in 1972, no longer two for the price of one. We were sort of made non-persons. And I think that the whole need for the Family Liaison Office grew out of this sense that, as non-persons, we still were so directly affected by the Foreign Service. We were told to move when it was convenient for them, and to a large measure, at that time at least, we were told to go where it was convenient for them. And somebody had to be pretty sick, or have some sort of really disastrous family problem, before you didn't do what you were told.

So the Family Liaison Office developed, or the need for that, out of this real need to look at the complicated roles of Foreign Service families, and the contributions that Foreign Service families made to an efficiently functioning Foreign Service, and to say, "Hey, you really need us, just like we need you, and we're in this together, and we've got to figure out ways of working together that are complimentary and cooperative." The forum group was already going when we came back from Freetown and I tried for quite a while to stay out of it, and I found I couldn't. I had something to say, and I had also the skills to say it. So I sat on the committee for part of a year and then Lesley came to me and she

said, “Would you please...” and I wrote this article. And she came to me and said, “Would I please edit the Newsletter for the AAFSW?” And I did. I was the editor the year that we were in the middle of the negotiations, the Forum report came out in May of ‘77, I think, and I took over the AAFSW Newsletter in the fall of that year; and edited it for four years. The last set of stories that I covered was the opening of the Family Liaison Office.

I then, as the editor, sat on a couple of other committees. I sat on the AAFSW Board and therefore got to help talk about how you were going to manage this. I attended Forum committees, but wasn’t a member of the Forum Board. And I sat on the negotiating committee of the AAFSW that met quite regularly that year with various members of the senior State Department.

Q: Was that Macomber at that point?

SULLIVAN: No, the Director General at that point was Carol Laise and then toward the end of the time it was Harry Barnes.

Q: He had been in ‘72 at the time of the directive.

SULLIVAN: He was the Director. No, this was Carol Laise. One of the things that we decided, was that there was possibly the need to rework the ‘72 directive. In the final analysis I don’t think that was ever done. But there was a series of meetings, first with Carol Laise and later with Harry Barnes. It was a committee of three, Janet Kennedy and...that’s awful, I can see her but the name is gone, and I. We had several sets of discussions on what needed to be done in terms of reworking this, and literally trying to implement it, and we got so far as sending a cable to the field asking for responses. And then it sort of died. The Family Liaison Office opened, and the decision was to see how that progressed for a year or so, and then by that time I was gone. I don’t think anybody ever revived it.

So in that sense I was in the thick of the negotiations both serving within the committee, and then turning around and acting as the reporter to write it all up for the AAFSW Newsletter.

The other thing we did at that point was, we decided that the Newsletter needed to be a more effective source of information for Foreign Service women about various issues. And there was a lot of talk going on. There were committees, and committees, and committees at that point. There were committees looking at the needs of kids, there were committees looking at the problems of re-entry, there were committees looking at community building, and they all sort of had a life of their own, so that there was a lot of things to write about. We tried to make the Newsletter much more focused on these kinds of issues, rather than simply to report about luncheon meetings, and luncheon speakers. Mind you, we couldn’t not report about that, we couldn’t not report about Book, because that’s where the money came from. But the point was to try and set up a way that Foreign Service women at home and abroad could communicate with each other about these

things that people were feeling so deeply.

The other thing that we tried to do, and I think sometimes that I enjoyed doing the most, was to run a series of stories in the Newsletter that helped with role models, because there were a large number of women, and actually a very large number of women, who, while they saw that there needed to be changes, had found creative ways of using their Foreign Service experience not only to benefit the Foreign Service but as a way to grow and expand themselves. We felt that both these women needed pats on the back, and that there was a real need for an exposure of role models.

Q: Do you remember who some of them are?

SULLIVAN: The one that I remember the most vividly is Shirley Umhoefer, who has since died. And in fact Shirley died between the time I interviewed her and the time that the article came out. Shirley was an AID (U.S. Agency for International Development) wife who lived in (inaudible), which is a very out of the way place, and she had become the first woman to get a degree in Sacred Theology from (inaudible). And the fact that she was a non-religious, and in fact a convert to Catholicism, made her having gotten this degree, an even more remarkable thing than if she had been a catholic woman religiously. She did it by doing short bits of intensive work in Manila and then she'd go back down to (inaudible) with this huge stack of books, and she worked on her degree. She had started out with her husband in the Pacific Islands, he was with the U.S. Navy in the Trust Territories. She had babies in strange places and she really had a fascinating sort of existence. I had known her in the Philippines, and I knew it was a good story. I also knew that she had cancer. I'm convinced she had cancer because, of course, they were in the islands where all the bomb testing was, and her husband later died of cancer as well.

She had used this experience to educate herself, and that living abroad had helped give her the view that this was what she wanted to do with the rest of her life. She went out to California expecting to live for quite a while. As soon as she got to California she died and I, in fact, wrote the article knowing she had died. That was a hard one, and yet it was a gift to be able to do that, and sum up how I felt about her and the kind of model that she made for all of us.

Another one was Pat _____ -- the trouble with getting older is that names leave you -- I'll give you xeroxes of these articles. But Pat, I had met because our boys danced at the ballet school together. She was a Foreign Service wife, and had adopted two children in Salvador, and had two children of her own. The thrust of that story was, how you combine Foreign Service living and a need to take care of children, your own and others, and she had managed to do this adoption by going in and A(inaudible) out the Foreign Minister at a luncheon one day. I mean, it was quite a good story.

Another person that I interviewed, and wrote up, was a woman who had started out as an anthropologist in writing travel guides to Guinea, and then, while her husband was with AID, went on to Nepal and wrote what has since become the major book on Nepalese art and culture, and had used her husband's travels as a way of continuing her professional

life. And had simply decided that she was going to be the beneficiary of the '72 directive and simply wasn't going to be a Foreign Service wife in the traditional role. So there were several of these kinds of stories that represented very different viewpoints on how you dealt with being a Foreign Service wife. I think that of all of the things we wrote that year, in some ways those, to me, were satisfying.

The other thing that we did, with the Newsletter that year, was a time-use survey, because it's one thing to say that we all put in all this time, and it's another thing to document it. So what we did was we, I guess it was about the December issue of the Newsletter, we had a two-page pullout that was a time-use survey and we sent copies of it to a number of key people around the world, and we got a whole lot of responses which we then wrote up in the last issue, that really documented that with the wives of senior officers there was a direct correlation between the number of hours of unremunerated labor that they put in, and the level of the husband's job. We set it all up in terms of work weeks because we decided that if we used that as the unit that people talked about, that men who read it would understand that.

We found one hyperactive Ambassador's wife, who was putting in 60 to 80 hours a week of being an Ambassador's wife between the representational roles and the community building roles. We found that the thing drops off as the husband's responsibility drops off. So it isn't that the senior officers' wives all do this, and the junior officers' wives don't. If you're at a small post and the junior officer has a very substantive position, the junior officer's wife is as busy as some senior officers' wives. In a very large post the wife of the administrative officer may not have any representational responsibilities at all, for instance, while the wife of the political or economic counselor, or the USIS officer, may have an almost constant realm of things that are harder and harder for her not to do. And the Ambassador's wife finds it harder and harder to.

The other thing that it showed, was that there were a certain group of women -- and this hyperactive woman was one of them -- were women who turned this very much into their career and because they were workaholics, this was what they were workaholic about, and that had as much to do with them as people, as it had to do with the demands of the job. But certainly at least a 40 hour a week was the norm. We had enough information on Ambassadors' wives to be statistically valid. We didn't have enough on wives in general to be anything more than suggestive. And what we documented was common knowledge, but it was important at the time to be able to have it documented. I think it still is. I don't think that that kind of time survey has ever been redone.

Q: The report on the role of the spouse in the Foreign Service pointed out that those senior wives are the unhappiest group in the Service.

SULLIVAN: Yes. They were damned if they did, and they were damned if they didn't. The younger wives didn't necessarily want to work, complained a great deal about the way the senior wives behaved even if you were very nice and generous. And further, if you were a bit detached, they complained about that. I think they still do to a degree. I don't think that being a Foreign Service wife has gotten any easier. I think it's interesting

-- the last couple of years I've been going to the Philippines in my own capacity, and found myself both on the outside looking in, and used very much as a sounding board. I think the issues are still all there, complicated by the fact that wives who want to work and need to work, many of them, in some cases can't work. The support systems are good, better if the Family Liaison Officer, the Community Liaison Office is there. But the money for lots of things isn't there.

I don't think it's going to be an easy...I don't think there are simple solutions. I think there are very complicated solutions, and I think that the solutions depend very much on the post as much as they depend on anything else. They also depend on the particular people at a particular time.

Q: I have also always felt that the '72 directive created a void and nothing ever came along and filled it.

SULLIVAN: I think that's true. That was the non-person issue. The Community Liaison Office solved some of the problems. It does provide information, it does provide help with housing. If it's well used it provides help with jobs, it provides help getting settled. It has taken over some of the most routine at the community building

Q: It has institutionalized what we used to do as volunteers.

SULLIVAN: Yes. I think that's probably valuable, particularly as more and more women have chosen to exercise other options, or feel like they don't have a choice not to. You can't just sort of...if you really have intentions of having some sort of career, you can't just sort of step out for a long period of time. I think lots of women need to do that, both financially and emotionally, and the more women you have involved doing that the less time they have to meet and greet, and so on. And I think there is some of it that the wives shouldn't have had to do necessarily anyway.

I think the routine shopping to be sure there's food in the refrigerator when somebody comes to post and moves into a new post. I'm not sure you should have to depend on somebody else's time for that, and yet in lots of the more out of the way places, it has to be done that way. You can't put somebody in a hotel.

I think the thing I feel sorriest about is that I don't think the Foreign Service is as supportive as it was. I mean, the same woman who told me not to wear shorts, and not to wear black dress to her parties when push came to shove, her husband found roses and sent them to me when a new baby was born, in a country that didn't raise roses really. The same person that has talked a lot about, the then Ambassador who talked about two for the price of one, etc., several times later when I needed a professional recommendation, I could go to him and say, "I'm applying for this job and I need a letter of recommendation. You've seen me work." I'm not sure that all of that exists as much. It comes down much more now to existing where there are people who feel it's important, and who do that as a routine way of living. And when you get into situations where the men are all -- and I shouldn't just say the men -- where the employees are all focused

very much on working, and not focused on creating a positive environment in which to work. I think there are places like that, and I think they are sometimes made less positive by the whole problems of terrorism, and rising costs of living, and the falling costs of the dollar. And I think things are tough.

Q: You mentioned when we talked the other day that somewhere along the line you became a survivor. Maybe you've always been a survivor. Is that a concept that grew as you...

SULLIVAN: I think it became clearer to me that this is what I was. I guess it never occurred to me that I shouldn't somehow figure out how to make the system work for me. There were things I wanted to do, that I had the skills, a number of them that were portable. And that it was important to me to use them. I've always felt that it was also in the long term in the best interest to the Foreign Service, that I use them. I have made myself into a professional inter-cultural communicator. I now do lectures about that as a process, and I write about it, and I've become a professional writer. But early on I decided that I would combine meeting the obligations of being Dan's wife, and the demands of the representation role. I think the representational role is an important one. I think that it is important for the people in whatever country we're living in, to know Americans, as it is important for us to know them. And to do this on some sort of personal basis. There are very few countries that are impersonal, but the United States is one of the more impersonal in many ways. We make quite a separation, just as we make a separation between church and state, we make a separation between work and private. And you can take a person out of a job and put him into another job, and people will pick up the connections with the job, because it's the job that you have the connections with.

In certain southeastern Asian and African countries that we've lived in, you had to earn your own way. People had to learn to accept you as a person, and this took a lot of time and effort, and I've always been willing to put that time and effort in, figuring that I benefitted out of it. This was part of the point of being there. But I learned rather early on that if I did these kinds of things, and if I was real quick in sizing up a situation, and volunteering to do the kinds of things that I did well and that fit in with what I was wanting to do anyway, that I was then on safe enough ground that I could often turn around and say, "No, I'm not going to do that, I don't have time." And this was accepted, because I was seen as being cooperative and productive. And, of course, then when I was the Consul's wife I set my own paces. I spent a lot of time on PTAs because I felt my children and schooling were important. I taught in the University of Indonesia. Progressively focused myself to the point that I found that when Dan retired, I'd lost my base. And in some ways his retirement has caused me more of a problem than it has caused him, which may be unusual, I don't know.

Dan's last post was Singapore, and by that time I had been working professionally in Washington, and had tried in the post before that to write a book, and had sort of made an agreement with Dan that I would be present for the kind of entertaining that we needed to do, but otherwise I was traveling in Sierra Leone, and we sat down plotted one at a time when he knew he had to entertain, and when I could travel in the good weather. And by

the time I got to doing that, we had been in Freetown long enough that our diplomatic colleagues, and government colleagues, knew me, and knew what I was doing, and so if I couldn't come they sort of understood, because I did come when I could. I mean, I think in terms of being a survivor, this is what I mean. That I figured out positive ways of balancing my own needs to do what I needed to do, and the situations needs for me to function in the situation.

So when I went to Singapore, Dan's job was such that it had absolutely no representation, or very little representational responsibility, and I figured out a way of being the visiting scholar at the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, and I spent my three years there doing research for writing a book on Singapore. I would very much, having finally gotten the children out of the way, liked to have had another tour or two overseas where I could continue this kind of pattern, where I would be where I had a base, and the substantive material that I liked to study, and interview, and write about on the situation into which I fit. Well, Dan was ready to retire, and the system was ready to retire him, and it came -- I mean, it comes to all of us -- but it came sooner than I had hoped. And I have found the three and a half years back here living quite difficult, because I'm a fish out of water, and how one finds one's new water, difficult. I think what we become, as Foreign Service wives also, is perpetual outsiders. And in my case, I'm probably more of a perpetual outsider than many because I grew up as a third culture kid. I was born in China, and lived for a while in Burma. I went to high school in India. So that I've always known I was an outsider. I didn't fit quite right when I came here, and I was more comfortable living overseas, as a visible outsider with a role, than I am as an invisible outsider with no role. I think that this may be true of a lot of us, Foreign Service officers and spouses. I'm not sure that it is as much of a problem for some people as it is for me, but I hadn't any experience of having really lived here for any length of time, ever. And the roots that I might have put down, I never put down, and this is one of the roles, and one of the prices that you pay. Because when you live here, and you know you're going overseas again, there's certain things you just don't do. And I'm no longer willing to take an entry level job, and the things that I've done, which have been very satisfying, and probably well beyond my educational attainment overseas, because I could teach, because they needed a teacher, because I could organize this, or organize that, because that was somebody that needed to do it. I could get access to people, and do thing :

So when you come back, and you settle down, and you retire, and particularly when you retire in the Washington environment where all of your ties are not cut, and you're not really starting over again, it's not simple, and it's certainly been very complicated for me to continue.

I wouldn't not do it again though. We have found it a very satisfying way to live, for all I have quite seriously resented being taken for granted.

Q: By the system?

SULLIVAN: By the system. Not by people, but by the system -- sometimes by people, because there are some people around who just don't have any sense, and who don't pay

attention to what other people around them do. But the system really does take its dependence for granted in many ways. In some ways the Family Liaison Office was sort of a sop, because having done that, then they didn't have to deal with some of the more complicated problems, particularly the representational roles of their senior officers, or the officers in senior positions at post.

I think that Dan and I have a great sense of satisfaction having been good representatives of the United States. It is still valuable to me, and I think was valuable to the United States, that people would come up to us in Freetown, and say, "We never thought we would see the son of an American diplomat walking in our school parades." The fact that we communicated at a human, as well as an official level, was really important. Perhaps, given the relative unimportance of the diplomatic function between some of the small African countries that we were in, and the United States at the time, the human level was the most important, because that is how long-term trust is built. And when people aren't willing to do this, not only are they, the individuals, the losers, but the whole country relationship is the loser.

Q: What you're telling me, is that sometimes the Service rewards, I want to say the wrong person, but not necessarily the person whose doing the needed thing at post.

SULLIVAN: I think it rewards often the wrong things.

Q: The wrong things...

SULLIVAN: I think that it gives only lip service to paying attention to culture, and cultural understanding, and the capacity to communicate. And I look around at the people who are leaving as the Service is changing, and I'm afraid that I think they're losing some of the most gifted of the people in this sense. People who spend a lot of time and so on at this, are not always the best games players in terms of American culture, and American work culture, which is very -- I don't even know the right words for it. So I think that it has been a good model, and I certainly wouldn't be what I am without it. And I don't think I really would want to be something else. I'm quite comfortable, most of the time, even with the pain that living without it gives me.

Q: You have been back to the Philippines. Did you do that on your own, or on what arrangements did you go back?

SULLIVAN: I went initially on an assignment for a magazine, and the assignment for the magazine took me -- I decided when we came back from Singapore, that if I couldn't get a job I would be a freelance writer. I now have a very flat head from pounding my head against a stone wall, and I have a great stack of rejection slips. But a couple of years ago a friend called, and said, "I know a magazine that's looking for somebody to do an article on doing business in Japan, and another article on doing business in Singapore, and would you be interested?" And I said, "Sure. I don't know a thing about doing business in Japan, but I can always ask, and that's the bulk of the story." So I went on this trip, and it was a free airlines and hotels were organizing it. So there was this ticket, and I realized

when I looked at the calendar, that the elections in the Philippines were taking place at the end of the trip. We had been in the Philippines to live for three years at the beginning of martial law, and at the time of the imposition of martial law when Marcos came in. "What fun," I thought. "How can I be that close and not go see it go out?" Because I was quite convinced that it was on its way out. So I covered the election in 1986 assuming that I could write an article, and get it into somewhere. Then I came back, and I wrote the article, and I sent it down to the Washington Post. I sent it on a Thursday, and on Friday there was a small revolution in the Philippines that actually threw Marcos out. And so everything that I had written about the election suddenly was out with Marcos, just because it had been overtaken by events. But a number of people saw that article -- what I write, and this comes back to my sense of myself as a voice, as distinct from maybe a proposal, an absolution. I think voices are advocates too, but I'm more a voice.

The book I did on Singapore was oral history of cottage industries, and demonstrated that small businesses in Singapore were very much a part of the scene, much to the surprise of the Singaporean government, who talked about them as invisible trades, or dying trades, or whatever. I wrote about the Philippine election in this same mode of simply editing conversations that I had had with other people. I was talking with some friends afterwards who had read this, and read a think piece I'd put together in a more objective mode, and they said, "You really need to keep watching these elections." So I began to look for a funding to go back because there were to be three elections. I applied for a Patterson Foundation Grant, which is for reporters, but I didn't get one. And I applied for a Fulbright, and I got nominated but didn't know what was going to happen about that, and elections take place when elections take place, so you have to go. Dan said, Let's just buy the first ticket." Then it became clear that I was sort of locked into this, and I had some money from my father. So I've been funded by the Gerald Linfield Memorial Trust, and have made four trips; one of them courtesy of Northeast Airlines because I had by then flown enough that I got a free ticket, and have been in the Philippines for each of the elections in the last year. When I'm there I'm loosely connected with the Institute of _____ Studies at San Carlos University, and I at the moment have a research associate at the Rush Center at Johns Hopkins, which means that I have library privileges and a title, which is very nice. Because the thing you need, to talk with any authority, even to be a good mouth piece, is some sort of an affiliation and a former Foreign Service wife is not the kind of an affiliation that anybody will take seriously.

The first time I started doing this sort of thing, was a series of interviews in Freetown. A friend of mine and I drove 5,000 in Sierra Leone visiting villages where they made things, particularly baskets and so on, but what we focused on was all kinds of things that were made for everyday use, not on the ritual carving and stuff. And I was writing to somebody at the University of California about this, explaining what I was doing, and he wrote back and said, "I suggest to you that you not say that you are Foreign Service wife because most people won't take that seriously." I have never figured out how not to say I was a Foreign Service wife, because people have got to know how you got there. I've learned to not put it in the first sentence. And I've learned to say that I did this while living in Cebu at the time my husband was the Consul. Now, that's weasel ____, but it does tell you something about the non-personhood of a Foreign Service wife, and the fact

that the Foreign Service wife, no matter how professional she may be in her capacity to do whatever she's doing in her own name, has no standing in that sense. So you have to be very careful about how you put that.

My husband is retired, I'm not. I'm just no longer connected with the Foreign Service, and I'm trying to keep on doing what I do.

Q: What is he doing?

SULLIVAN: He's a retired annuitant which means, and I swear it's the best of both worlds, he goes three days a week and he still works on refugees at the State Department. He still has his room, doesn't have to leave it, but he doesn't have to work full time. He sings, he's happy as a clam. I'm still a bit of a misplaced person.

Q: And you retired four years ago, right?

SULLIVAN: Three and a half, he did. I just changed places. Do you have more you want to talk about?

Q: I'm just trying to put that in context with your retirement experience, in context with your Foreign Service experience. I was just delighted to come here, and not go anywhere else again.

SULLIVAN: The thing that I've learned to do -- you asked about being a survivor -- the thing that I have learned to do, was use living abroad as the substance of my own career so that Dan and I very much worked in tandem.

We started, before the tape, talking about what this does to marriages and children. I think that the opportunity that it has for a kind of in-tandem work for a couple, is one of the things that can make good marriages better. The old bromide -- good marriage is better, a rotten marriage is a bust, and the middle somewhat helps. It's made our marriage better. It gave us not only the commonality of living together and raising children, but working towards some common goals and the things that I did -- the teaching, the research, and the writing -- played off of what he did. I mean it wasn't the same substance, it's very different areas, but it benefitted the other, and so we were working together in so many ways.

There are lots of writers in Washington. What has made me good at what I'm good at, is that I had a substance to write about, or series of substances to write about, that other people didn't have. And coming back home has removed the substance. You can't keep writing the kinds of things that I think need to be written, without keeping going back. I mean, one of the problems with a lot of writing, academic writing particularly, about other places is that it's all based on research that was done 10 and 15 years ago, and the world has turned six times since then. It's difficult trying to put together a new set of substances, and I haven't been willing to give the old substances up. One of the things

that you have to be, to be an effective Foreign Service wife, or husband, or child, but dependent, is that you have to be very good about putting yourself together again in a new mode for a new place, and looking at what your skills are, and what the opportunities of the new post are, and then meshing them, so that the career that you put together for yourself isn't a straight ladder. You begin to feel after a while like that MC Escher painting of ladders that go from no place to no place.

Q: What you've done here is, you've come back, you've put the rugs down, you've hung the curtains, the pictures are on the wall, now let's go to it.

SULLIVAN: Well, I guess, but I guess the thing I'm mad about, the degree that I'm mad, is that I'm tired of putting myself together, and I would just as soon stayed the together I was. I'm not quite sure what the together I want to put myself now. This one is sort of forever, and that's a harder job. I think that may be very idiosyncratic. I think it's probably unusual for the Foreign Service wife. I think many are really very glad to settle down. But I've always been the rolling stone in this The one, like a fire horse, be off at the claning of a travel order, perfectly willing to go almost any place. And I miss that. There are lots of other parts of it I don't miss. But the travel, and the living, and the opportunity to see new places, and know new people, that I miss.

Between what I did with my own family, and what I did with Dan, was to see the end of the colonial world. I was in Burma within a year of its independence. I was in India shortly after its independence -- this was with my parents. We went to Malaysia the year after it was independent. We went to Nigeria the year after it was independent. We were in Indonesia for the first election after Sukarno. We were in the Philippines for martial law. In Sierra Leone nothing much happened in those terms. We were in Malaysia when Singapore...when Harry Lee was elected in 1959, and we were in Singapore for the 25th anniversary of Singapore independence. So that we have really watched amazing growth in the Third World, and in independence. We've never been a part of the European Foreign Service, ever. We have lived on the fringes of Islam, we have lived in the _____. And that's where an awful lot of the world is, and I'm inclined to think that some of the things that we know, are now things that there is real need for hearing in this country. I think that sometimes it's discouraging is that Foreign Service isn't so unusual, the rest of the country doesn't appreciate that kind of thought either. It can leave you feeling, it's a grey and gloomy day.

We've talked about rewards, and I sounded gloomy a minute ago, but there have been some very nice rewards. And one of the nicest, in an odd way, was in the New Yorker magazine. A couple of years ago there was a middle of the spread, a four page ad for Singapore, and it was written by a woman friend of mine, and it was done as an essay. Towards the end she was writing about the connections between Singapore and the United States, and they're interesting. They start with the wife of the first Consul in Singapore who was the daughter of Paul Revere. Most of it is about Singapore, but she started with Paul Revere's daughter, and the contributions that Americans have made to life in Singapore. Interestingly enough, they were all women. They were all wives. They were all there because their husbands were there, and they had all one way or another,

found things to do. There were _____, the continuing living in Singapore, which is a product of the Singapore American Women's Association. There's a lovely little book on the Singapore Botanical Gardens. And then she said, "And there's the book which Margaret Winfield Sullivan, wrote is of lasting contribution to the culture of Singapore. (end of tape)

And I've never forgotten. I know that my children had mumps. And I think the ability to rise to the occasion, as peculiar as the occasion may have turned out to be, is probably another sort of sign of what it's like to have been a Foreign Service wife.

We had a series of parties in Kaduna because Soapy Williams was the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs at that point, and he made two trips to Africa in our two years at post, and without fail he arrived in Kaduna in the middle of Ramadan when, of course, none of our good Moslem friends would go anywhere. So that you had to really figure out ways of calling in every chip you owned in order to deal with it. They had him the second time on a very, very tight schedule, and one of the people who was there in the American community was with AID, and was a guy named Hanna _____, who was from Michigan. His brother was the president at the University of Michigan. Hanna's specialty was chickens, so much so that we called him Chicken Hanna behind his back. We knew that if he got anywhere near Soapy Williams, that he would say, wouldn't you like to see my chickens? and Williams being ever a politician would have said, "Of course," and that would have undone this very carefully done schedule. So the Consul and my husband came to me and they said, "Margaret, we have a job for you at this party. You are to stick with Chicken Hanna like glue, and you are to keep him away from Soapy Williams." And I, as a consequence, knew more about chickens than anyone would ever want to know, and that I have conveniently always suppressed. An hour and a half of listening about chickens.

That was the same time that Soapy Williams got off the plane and there was this crowd at the airport -- the reason the crowd was there, was a whole lot of women were meeting the governor of the northern region -- he wasn't even the governor, he was the senior political figure of the northern region, and was in fact the political power of Nigeria at the time. He'd been off and they were all out to meet him, and they'd all go hoooo-ooo, and they had these huge big gold earrings that were like plates, and had NPC -- Northern People's Congress -- in the earrings. They saw this plane land and at first they thought it was going to be the governor, so they started going hooo-ooo, and Soapy got off the plane, and he waded into the crowd, and he started shaking hands with all of these women. He thought this was just marvelous, but what he did was, he shook hands with every prostitute in Kaduna. This was the core of the women's movement of the political party because all the other proper women were at home and in purdah.

But, we were told when we arrived in Kaduna, that we probably would never get to know Nigerian women, and that they certainly wouldn't come to our house. But we were there at the right time, things were changing, and before we left we had had almost all of Dan's opposite numbers wives to the house. There were some rules to the game. You didn't have a Minister if you had Permanent Secretaries, and their wives to dinner, you didn't

ask a Minister. If you were having one or two or three, they would come and bring their wives. Our oldest son was in the same school with their children, because there was no other school, so the few foreign children who were of an age, went to a school that was run by the northern Nigerian government for the children of expatriates, I mean the same sort of school. So Jerry went to school with them, and the wives came to our house to dinner. One time Dan invited the aide to the governor to bring his wife. He said, "Well, I have two of them." Dan wasn't real swift, and so he didn't say anything, and the guy came by himself. So the next time we invited him to dinner, Dan said, "Please come and bring your wives." And he came, and brought both of his wives to dinner. Emily Post doesn't really cover the situation. They had on pink clothes, the sort of lapas that African women wear, a loose top, a pink turban, and they were both made out of the same cloth. We didn't ever try to do a seated dinner. One of the joys of the Foreign Service, as far as the Foreign Service that I've lived in, is that I still don't know how to do a seated dinner - - well, I guess I know, but I don't do them. They came and they sat together all night, and they left, and they had a good time, and about two months later they both left him at the same time.

We all have our posts about which we have stories. Then there was the time we were taking the DCM, who had come up from Lagos to Kaduna, and we took him up to Zaria, which was the next town, and then we all drove on to Kano -- it's 150 mile drive, and it was an all day trip. The consular district was larger than France. We went to Zaria to call on the Emir, and the arrangements were supposed to have been made for Mrs. Green and me to call on the Emir's wives at the same time that the men were calling on the Emir. And somehow the arrangements, as they often do, didn't work right. So we arrived at the palace just as the men were leaving. So the Emir decided to take Mrs. Green and me to introduce us to his wives. So we got taken through the harem by the Emir. The Emir was a good 6'4"-6'6", he was a huge man. He had four wives as Emirs do, and a bunch of concubines. The ground rules in Islam are that you can have up to four wives provided you treat them equal. The harem was a square with four small roomy houses -- houses that were like rooms, one in each corner. The construction, of course, being mud brick and bamboo. In the ceilings of each of these rooms were big tin plates and china plates, and they were there so that if the roof started to collapse, the plates would fall out first and break and sound the alarm so everybody would run out.

He introduced us to the first wife, and he introduced us then to the second wife, and then we went into the third wife's house. It was very barren, because she had just had a baby and on the eighth day you burn all the papers and things that the baby had been delivered on are burned in the room to purify it. This is one of the advantages of mud architecture, it doesn't burn down. It may collapse when it rains too much but it doesn't burn down. The room was just being put together after this, and the wife came out with this baby and the Emir, this big old guy, took this baby, and he showed it to us, and he said, "See, it's mine." He showed us that the baby had been born with six fingers, and it wasn't until then that I realized that the Emir, of course, also had six fingers on each hand. It's not as uncommon as it might seem because it's common enough in Nigeria that there is a word for it in the language for a person with six fingers.

Then he took us to call on the fourth wife who was barren, and was clearly his favorite wife. They'd been married for about 25 years which in a context of keeping wives only if they have children, meant that she was somebody very special for him to have kept.

Then we got taken through a little door in the side wall of the harem, and back into the palace. There was a door right to the right of where we came in, and there was the biggest bed that I have ever seen in my life, and says the Emir, "This is where my wives sloop me." Then we went on into the dining room. I don't know how many chairs it had, it must have had 30, gold, Louis the XV, covered with stuff. The Emir wore these lovely agbada robes, which are the big cotton things with embroidery all over them. They were heaped on it. There was a little fake Christmas tree on the table. There was maps of the world. all sorts of stuff all over. It was an amazing experience, and doubly so for having been taken through the harem by the Emir himself.

Q: Great stories.

SULLIVAN: Oh, you know, we all have our snake stories and our other kinds of stories.

Q: Those are good. I'm glad we put those on.

Q: This is an impromptu interview with Margaret Sullivan on April 16, 1989 and we're going to talk about the 1972 Directive.

SULLIVAN: No, we're going to talk about what led to the reconsideration of the '72 directive in 1978-'79.

Q: Let me ask you a question right here and there. Was that rejected flat out by the Department?

SULLIVAN: No, no.

Q: Nothing ever came of it, did it?

SULLIVAN: Nothing ever came of it, and I think...Well, let me tell you what we did, and then I think you'll discover why not.

In the various parts of pushing to form the Family Liaison Office, the Forum Report made a series of recommendations. The major recommendation was that there needed to be what became the Family Liaison Office, to deal with the spectrum of needs of families -- wives in particular but, more broadly, families.

Q: May I ask you a question here? Was it felt that need for the Family Liaison Office arose out of the fact that the spouse support system had been eroded by the '72 directive? Or was it just a change of times, or a little bit of both?

SULLIVAN: I would say it was probably both. Certainly the '72 directive, in that sense, had poisoned the well. And a great deal of the support system of wives helping wives had broken down. But the problems had also gotten a great deal more complex. Even in the period between '72 and '78 the number of small, out of the way posts, had increased even further in that period. The drug problem for children in large parts of the world had gotten to be really quite severe. There was a strong recognition that there was inadequate mental health facilities for people. There was a major change in terms of the desire, on the part of a good many women, for their own occupations, and therefore there was a real need to provide ways that people could work...

There was a real need for information...

Q: Dissemination of information...

SULLIVAN: Dissemination, not only the dissemination of it, but the gathering of it. The Overseas Briefing Center could deal with certain kinds of things, but it didn't deal with a lot of the other information. There was also a feeling, and some of this was an outgrowth of just the much more unsettled times, there was a real feel in that there was a need for an ombudsman to deal on behalf of the officially unofficial with the system. And all of this set of needs was what came out of the analysis of the forum report. As you know, and as you've heard from other people -- and this I only know from observing it because I really stayed somewhat to the side of this -- they had solicited responses from women all over the world.

Q: Asking them what they felt was...

SULLIVAN: Asking a whole series of questions. And on the basis of these questions the forum report came up with a series of recommendations of things that were needed. At the same time that this material was being gathered from overseas there was a series of working groups on different aspects of it, meeting in Washington all the way through the winter of '76-'77. Among other things, aside from the Family Liaison Office, there was the recommendation that the '72 directive be reassessed. The Department was quite willing to do this, because the Department could see that while the '72 directive met some positive needs that needed to be addressed, and that it was right and proper that wives be taken off husbands' efficiency reports, and that the most egregious of the top down management of wives be stopped. And that it was in fact true that the wives weren't employees, and therefore nobody really could demand anything of them.

There was a clear recognition on the part of the people working on the forum report, and certainly on the part of a few people in management in the Department, right straight up to the Secretary of State.

Q: That was Cyrus Vance.

SULLIVAN: It was, and Gay Vance was kept well apprised of all of this, and she

was...we will have to interview her because, while she was not in the strictest sense Foreign Service, she was key in getting some of this stuff done. Pillow talk works. There was a recognition that the '72 directive had really done only half the job. And therefore there was a committee of three. It was _____ Johnston. I was one of the three. Pat Kennedy, who has since remarried and has got another name -- divorced the Foreign Service, and I were designated as a committee of three to represent the Forum and AAFSW in a series of conversations with the Director General of the Foreign Service to talk about what really needed to happen.

Q: And this is while Lesley was...

SULLIVAN: Lesley (Dorman) was president of AAFSW. The agreement had pretty well be reached for FLO, but that was going along at the same time. The time use survey was going along at the same time. I was on the committee in my capacity really as editor of the AAFSW Newsletter. We started out with meetings with Carol Laise, who was Director General. Stephanie Kinney was working for her, so Stephanie sat in on it, and there were the five of us. We had two or three meetings trying to hash out what the issues were. What could be done to change this small document, and the official statement. Then Carol Laise left, and Harry Barnes became Director General, and the conversation continued. By this time the Family Liaison Office had just recently opened. The decision was that it really was time to poll the field. To get input from the field on what people thought of the '72 directive. How they thought it could be modified. A telegram was drafted, which we helped draft, which was sent through the Family Liaison Office to the field asking if, in effect, there was a feeling that the '72 directive should be reconsidered.

Q: Is that why I never saw it? Because I was here.

SULLIVAN: It was circulated in three ways, certainly two. If you belonged to AAFSW at the time, there was a big story in the Newsletter and you've seen that. I mean, it's in one of the ones that I know you have because I gave it to you. It has some of the other stories in it too. It was sent in telegrams to the field. If I remember correctly there was some attempt to circularize the Department. At that point, and I think later too, the whole question of how you reach people, how you communicate with them in an institution where spouses don't exist in any formal way; where you are dependent on the goodwill of the husband, or the employee, to bring something home. Some do, and some don't. And where distributing paper to everybody in the Department of State is a very expensive business, and nobody knows who has wives, and who doesn't. So communication was difficult.

So this cable went out, and it sort of died simply because there wasn't any real strong response, and because nobody could come up with adequate institutional mechanisms to deal with the other half of the issue. I mean, the other half of the issue is, how do you recognize the wives who -- yes, and I'm using the word "wives" deliberately, because it's rarely the dependent male who steps in, in this kind of breach -- how do you recognize these people? What is the appropriate way of doing it? Some of this was played into thoughts that then went into the 1980 Foreign Service Act that legislated some changes

for women.

Q: Oh, did it actually mention spouses?

SULLIVAN: Oh, yes. The 1980 Foreign Service Act, if I remember correctly, that is the one that vests in the spouse a certain part of the husband's retirement, and whether the marriage is intact, or not.

Q: That was 1980? Because it didn't go into effect until '88.

SULLIVAN:: Oh, no. It went into effect earlier than that.

Q: Sarah Dean got her first check in 1988 and she was...

SULLIVAN: It's in the 1980...

Q: No, when we started...

SULLIVAN: But you see it was in the Act. But I don't know that it was necessarily... then it had to be fought through the courts.

Q: Maybe that was it.

SULLIVAN: Or maybe it had to be fought with her particular husband and on the Hill. But there was some stuff in the 1980 act, and AAFSW actively lobbied that, and we need to talk to people about how that was done.

Q: Mariam Hirsch, it seems to me there are a Mariam and a Marion, or two Mariams.

SULLIVAN: But the other thing is, you see, various things that have come since then have all really and truly been attempts to find some sort of institutional way of dealing with this other half of the issue. How do you recognize it? And, in point of fact, nobody has come up with a good one. And where there have been some good ideas come up with, they generally wouldn't fly on the Hill.

Q: The obvious one is to give the spouse an option to be hired, write a job description for a Foreign Service spouse, and give her the option to be hired as a spouse. Cut out some fat somewhere else and move that money over...

SULLIVAN: But you get into the very legal hassles of nepotism, and a whole bunch of other stuff, and what do you do then about Congressional wives, and what do you do about the President's wife?

Q: Oh, I'm sure it's an issue larger than the Foreign Service.

SULLIVAN: But that's why it's never been done. The other perfectly logical way to do

it, and I've always pushed for this one, is Social Security.

Q: Oh, yes, well that...

SULLIVAN: The problem, in my view, with the Foreign Service Associate proposal, was that it put the emphasis on the wrong syllable. That it looked at work, and it tended to sort of give make work jobs to people that...they've had a lot of problems. It never did address the issue of what it is that the Foreign Service does, that the spouse does, for the Foreign Service as distinct for her husband. In other words, the representational function. It's this representational function that falls to the private individual, is the part that nobody has ever been able to deal with.

Q: Because there's no one else to do it.

SULLIVAN: There isn't anyone else to do it. You can't hire it done. I mean, bachelors and single people do hire it done.

Q: And at some posts the spouses establish catering services.

SULLIVAN: Oh, yes. And after 1972 we put a 10 percent onto everything that we turn in. That 10 percent is just simply in there as a catering charge, and it was paid to me for my employment. Most of the time all we ever got was as a tax write-off. I mean, we were often enough out of pocket. The whole question of how you recognize this...and it was to this end that we needed to document all of this, that we did the time use survey. I mean, all of this stuff is of a piece.

Q: Oh, it's all tied in together. I feel that the reason that the Associate Proposal never flew was because it wasn't primarily to meet the needs of the Service. It was to meet the needs of the individual, and why the State Department... I hope this never went over to Congress. To ask Congressmen in the days of Graham Rudman to pass a bill that allowed me to go and off and have the State Department pay me to be a social worker in Trinidad because that was my field.

SULLIVAN: I think that it was an idea that had some merit to it, but it didn't look at the real serious issues.

Q: It didn't look at it the right way.

SULLIVAN: It died actually because of budgetary constraints. It died just at the point before Graham Rudman when things were coming... I mean it died in '85.

Q: I suppose Graham Rudman...

SULLIVAN: Yes. It died because there were too many other things happening to the budget. I think it also died because it didn't have...the reason that -- to back up -- the reason that '78 worked, the reason that we got the Family Liaison Office, was that it was

very clear that this met a dual need. It met the needs of the dependents, or at least addressed them. And in so doing it met some very real needs that the Department was seeing.

Q: You've got it backwards. You've got to put the need for the Department first, and the need for the spouse afterwards. In the mind of the people who legislate...

SULLIVAN: In the mind of the Department, they could see the dual need. I'm not sure that it was ever looked at as one first, or the other first. It was very clear at that point, that there was a serious problem. There were more and more families who were unwilling to go back overseas. There was a great deal of anger. Times had changed, and there was a recognition on the part of a number of people... I mean, I've said it several times before, but I think you can't say it too many times. That worked, probably nothing like that will work again. It worked because it was the right confluence of people, and time being right, and issues. It had built up the right head of steam.

Q: If the Associate Proposal did anything, and perhaps there were other factors involved here, but when they lost all of the FSNs in Moscow, and they immediately set up -- I forget what they called it, it wasn't Spouse Employment Program, but whatever the name of it was, and I've got it in an AAFSW article, the Associate Proposal had put the thought in somebody's mind at the Department that the spouses were there and could be hired. Or maybe it happened earlier.

SULLIVAN: That had happened earlier, because one of the outgrowths of the early work that Susan McClintock did, and Janet Lloyd, and that group, was to really flush out the PIT (part-time, intermittent, temporary) position proposal. It was quite clear in lots of posts that there were a fair number of PIT positions.

Q: Do you know what my objection to those...

SULLIVAN: They had a lot wrong with them...

Q: They're such piddling jobs, mostly.

SULLIVAN: Well, in some places they were, and in some places they weren't. Dan had two very substantial PITs working for him in the refugee program in Singapore. It depended very much on the need of the post whether you had serious needs. In some posts they were part time Consuls, and they got some consular training. Some of the wives were brought in as PITs to deal with heavy periods in the consular cycle. In Cebu, when I was back there visiting in the early '80s -- it's now a four man post, or three officer post, and a USIS person -- and only rather recently did they have a security cleared secretary. So they used wives as PITs. Got clearances for them, and used them as secretaries because they didn't have any. So that at some posts there was a serious need for the kind of labor that wives could offer. In other posts it was just running -- and one shouldn't say "just" -- it was running the commissary, or it was running the American Recreational Club, or running the switchboard.

Q: Or filing in the Visa... Those were the only things I saw. There was one good job at the post where I was CLO, which had been carefully taken away from an FSN and given to the DCM's young wife, because she was 29 and accustomed to working and he wanted to keep her happy. And look what that did to FSN morale. To have the best job taken away from the FSNs and given to a 29 year old officer's wife.

SULLIVAN: This was one of the problems with the Associate program. On the other hand, and this is the institutional issue, you've got to keep some of these people. If they're going to keep the bright, young men, you've got to keep the whole situation going.

Now, I think it's going to be really important that we talk to a number of people that have been involved particularly in the work issue. Because in the discussion leading up to the Forum Report, while there was real concern about mental health and some of the broader family issues, the two real biggies was the whole issue of representation on the one hand; and the issue of employment for spouses on the other. Those are the two naughtiest questions, and they still exist absolutely. They've changed faces a little bit.

Q: The bilateral agreements, of course, would be the ideal...

SULLIVAN: They started. I mean, that's one of the first things that they started, is getting those...

Q: How many of those do we have now?

SULLIVAN: You know, I don't know.

Q: Fourteen or fifteen we had several years ago.

SULLIVAN: There are not a lot. They're not easy to get because of the nature of employment in lots of places. The other problem is the very real question of conflict of interest. Dan, when he was Chargé, had to say to one of the wives -- and I think maybe I told you this story on the other tape, I'm not sure. One of the wives at a small post that we were at in West Africa, that the person that she wanted to manage a restaurant for, was simply a person that it was inappropriate for somebody from the Embassy to be working for. That the conflicts, and the possibility for pressure -- he was a person that the Embassy did business with, and the possibility for pressure on her, if she wanted to keep her job, to see that the family that that was, got the contract. I mean, it was simply asking for trouble. It was hard for him to say that. I mean, he did, but in technical terms, I think. By that point he couldn't say she couldn't do it because you no longer had to get the approval for a job.

Q: Not even from the Sierra Leone government? I mean, could you just go in and work for somebody.

SULLIVAN: They weren't picky.

Q: It would probably have taken them her whole tour to get the papers together.

SULLIVAN: As I remember, there weren't real serious problems about work permits, but when I started teaching at the University of Indonesia in the '60s, as long as I did it as a volunteer there wasn't any problem. I volunteered for one semester, and then they said, "Please come on our regular faculty." Well, once you go on the regular faculty, it seems to me that it is better for everybody, that there be money involved. I wasn't out for lots of money, I was just out for whatever Indonesia counterparts were paying. I had to get permission from the Administrative Officer, who was of the very old school, who thought that of course it was wrong for me to do anything but donate to the poor heathen. The Indonesian government were quite happy to arrange for me to be employed and paid. That went very quickly given the sluggish nature of their bureaucracy. It was amazing. It took four or five months of badgering on my part to get the Embassy to give permission because at that point -- this was pre-'72 -- I still had to have formal permission to receive income. And even as late as '82 in Singapore, the Embassy wasn't wildly happy about those of us who worked outside because of the whole issue of how do you deal with taxes? How do you deal with whether somebody has diplomatic immunity or not? What does this do to...

Q: You don't have to pay taxes on money earned in a foreign country when you're living out of the United States.

SULLIVAN: No, no. How do you deal with Singaporean taxes?

Q: I never paid any in Curacao.

SULLIVAN: Were you employed outside the Embassy? Well, in the long run I was paid piecemeal, and for piece work, and we just finessed the whole thing. Had I had a job in Singapore, I would have had to pay Singaporean taxes, and the Embassy...

Q: Weren't we absolved as diplomatic? Weren't we absolved from local taxes. That must have been the case in Curacao.

SULLIVAN: Well, you are, and you aren't. This is the issue. This is one of the issues on the work permit. When you're working as a regular employee in a local thing, then at what point does your diplomatic immunity stop. That has to be negotiated. So this is one of the reasons that lots of embassies haven't been wanting to push this, because, there again, it's one of the issues on which, if other relationships are sticky, that there can be leverage put.

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Daniel P. Sullivan

Spouse Entered Service: August 1956

Left Service: Dec. 1984

Status: spouse: retired annuitant, self: writer (not retired)

Posts:

1959-1961 Kuala Lumpur (Malaya, now Malaysia)

1961-1963 Kaduna, Nigeria

1967-1971 Jakarta, Indonesia

1971-1974 Cebu, Philippines

1974-1976 Freetown, Sierra Leone

1981-1984 Singapore

Place and Date of birth: Tsinan China; July 20, 1934

Maiden Name: Margaret Winfield

Parents (Name, Profession)

Dr. Gerald Winfield, USAID, Dr. of Public Health, Third World Development

Louise Parks Winfield, homemaker / writer / peace activist

Schools (Prep, University)

Woodstock School, Mussoorie, U.P. India

College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio

American University, Washington, DC

Date and Place of Marriage: Arlington, Virginia; December 23, 1954

Children:

Gerald (32)

Gay (30)

Walter (29)

Charles (24)

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:

Writer, editor, administrator, intercultural communicator

End of interview