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YETTA WEISZ

Interviewed by Mary Louise Weiss
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INTERVIEW

Q: This is Mary Louise Weiss interviewing Yetta Weisz on May 4, 1992, at her home. Yetta, would you give us a little background on your life before you entered the Service?

WEISZ: I was born in New York City in the Bronx, in what is now, of course, Fort Apache. It was a very happy childhood, as I recall. My parents were loving parents who concentrated on education. My sister and I are (laughing) both schoolteachers because of this. Papa was a garment worker who was also an ardent trade unionist.

I went to college until the day I was married to a man who turned out to be a Foreign Service Officer. He didn't start out that way! We came to Washington during the New Deal period and I continued my schooling. I became a teacher graduating from Wilson Teachers College. My first job was in the Baltimore Department of Public Welfare as what they called a social worker. It was really what I called a relief investigator. From there I transferred to the Baltimore school system and was a teacher until the children were born. And because I didn't believe in latchkey children I quit my job and became a mother (she laughs) of three children.

In 1952 the family -- Morris Weisz, Yetta Weisz and the three children -- went to Paris for the Marshall Plan program. He was busy doing his thing and I was involved, because I had one boy, in the Boy Scouts. I was a Boy Scout leader at the American Church in Paris, and when Ellen was old enough to be Girl Scout, there seemed not to be a Girl Scout group and Dr. Willams, at the American Church, suggested that I leave the Boy Scouts and become the Girl Scout leader. The Boy Scouts said, "Well, who's going to be our leader?" I said, "Well, you all have mothers and fathers, one of them could be your leader, because I'm going to be the leader of the Girl Scouts." And so I became the leader of the Girl Scouts.

A very important thing happened. (trying to recall which year) Was the Hungarian Uprising in 1956? [yes] Hungarian students were crossing the river into Austria, which couldn't contain them and a group was brought from Austria to Paris by the International Rescue Committee (IRC). I then became part of that committee, working to collect clothing and food for the masses, it seems, because we collected masses of clothing that were assembled at the American Legion post in Paris. My children came and helped assemble, we sorted, we cleaned, we put the clothing in boxes and lo and behold, American "fly boys" were able to take exercise training carrying clothing to a point

where, I guess, it was useful.

Q: May I ask you a question about Paris? You worked with the Boy Scouts and with the Girl Scouts. Were you involved with their school in any way or with an American Women's group?

WEISZ: No, I was never even invited to an American Women's group, I didn't even know (laughing) there was an American Women's group. Maybe it was my own lack of understanding.

Q: Perhaps there was none at the time.

WEISZ: Maybe there was none, I just don't know, I was never welcomed by anybody. But who welcomes a wife of Marshall Plan's workers? My husband was there to do his job and I was there with my three children to do what I would do anywhere in the world.

It was an exciting, kind of bewildering kind of experience for me. I was young, I had never been outside the Bronx except to go to Washington, and here I was in Paris, the hub of the world, it seemed. Those were good days. I seem to feel (she laughs) that every day was a good day.

Q: Were your children in school then?

WEISZ: Yes. They went to the French schools. They seemed not to be as happy as they should have been, so we transferred them at the end of their first year in French schools to the American International School and three happy children emerged from this transfer.

We left Paris in '57 and returned to Washington. In 1960 my children were old enough, I thought, for them to go to school and only Lucy, the youngest, who was in the 2nd or 3rd grade, was a latchkey child for a while because I returned to work at the Sharp Health School, a public school in [the] District of Columbia, for children with neuromuscular disabilities. It's a school established by an Act of Congress because parents of such children were feeling left out of the education system, their children had nowhere to go.

I had no special training as a special teacher. I made it clear to the principal that my job was teaching and I would be teaching the children to the best of my ability. My five years there were very gratifying. I know one can't see pictures on this tape but I have here a farewell party booklet that was made by I guess one of the teachers or perhaps the principal, with a little poem about involvement in all sorts of creative work with children at the school who were no longer children, some of them.

I was history teacher for the junior and senior high school, so that some of my children were 25 years old, all with physical disabilities, all eager for an education. And I have here a report that was sent to me in one of the places where I was. In '78 one of my students was being interviewed by the Washington Post -- there is her picture and her

name -- as a mail clerk in the Department of Transportation.

Q: A success story.

WEISZ: Yes. I think there were other success stories that I'm not aware of, but the involvement of Sharp Health School opened my eyes to many, many wonderful things that could be done with children who had been neglected for many, many years. Better late than never, so there we were, embarked on exciting new approaches to reach children with disabilities.

At one point the whole city of Washington was excited about the TV program, "It's Academic." The schoolchildren were competing -- "what group is smarter than the next group?" -- and nobody ever invited the Sharp Health School children. I called the TV program and said, "Our children are never included in 'It's Academic.'" And they said, "Do you think your children could participate? Aren't they handicapped" I said, "The brain isn't handicapped, the physical handicap is there, yes, but they're students here at school and I'm their teacher."

Well, we did participate; we were invited. Sharp Health School didn't win the "It's Academic" program but we did tie the score with a very prestigious Roosevelt High School group, and our children became very proud. Until that point, they never wanted to wear a sweatshirt that said "Sharp Health School" because it marked them as handicapped. They were not handicapped. As soon as they began to realize that they had a place in the sun, they were very proud to wear "Sharp Health School."

I was invited to participate in a curriculum revision committee to revise the history curriculum for the city of Washington. Here in my hot little hand is the curriculum revision, with a thank you note from the department head. I also served as the chairperson -- we called them chairmen in the 1960s -- of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia Round Table, which was a discussion of political affairs, historic affairs, and I have all these documents about the Round Table.

In 1965 my husband asked, "How would you like to go to India?" I don't hear India because I'm a geography-history teacher, I hear Indiana! (laughter) The idea of India was as far as the moon. I said, "What will we do in Indiana?" He said, "I didn't say Indiana, I said India." Well, the next thing we knew we were on our way to Delhi where Morris would be serving as the Counselor for Labor affairs.

Q: Did all your children go with you?

WEISZ: The three children accompanied us. Lucy was in 9th grade, enrolled in the American School in Delhi. Ellen was going into her sophomore year at Wisconsin and said, "Gee, I don't want to be left behind, the family's going to India, why don't I go too?" We said, "Well, what will you do there?" She said, "There must be a school I can enroll in." Of course, she didn't speak Hindi, so she was not accepted in Delhi University. But she went to the Peace Corps office and was just sitting around wasting

time when Mr. Ashabranner, the head of Peace Corps [in India], came in and said, "Why are you sitting there doing nothing? Here, type this."

Ellen typed, she filed, she worked for a week and at the end of that time the northern regional officer, Felix Knaut, came to her and asked, "Ellen, who is paying you?" She said, "Nobody." He said, "Well, who hired you" She said, "Nobody." And he said, "Well, what are you doing here" She said, "I'm working!" (laughter) They decided she was ingenious enough to have given of her time and energies and enthusiasm to warrant receiving -- what was it, ten rupees a day to pay for the scooter for her transportation to the regional office.
But she did more than that. Because she was aware that so many of these young Peace Corps boys and girls, volunteers, were in Holy Family Hospital, and we lived only three streets away from the hospital, she became a Florence Nightingale. She would carry goodies to the hospital, and reading matter. I was unaware of the goodies because it was my cook who was on the sly creating goodies for Ellen to take to Peace Corps volunteers. She didn't realize she didn't have to do it on the sly (laughing) but it's more fun that way, I guess.

David, our eldest son, had been doing a junior year abroad program under the University of Wisconsin auspices at Aix-en-Provence When he heard that we were going to India, he said, "The whole family's going to be in India? And I'm going to be left out?" So he applied for a second junior year abroad -- I think he's the only one in the world who's ever had two junior years abroad -- and studied at Benares Hindi University in the school of Indology. His work must have been taught in English, though it never occurred to me to ask. If he was learning so much, it must have been in English.

Q: How did you feel about your introduction to India when you arrived?

WEISZ: Well, let's start with the first week. The first day as the airplane hit the airport, there was a welcoming committee, and Mary Lou and Len Weiss were the welcoming committee. It was beautiful to have somebody in the middle of the night with smiling face welcome a family of bedraggled people who had flown all the way from Washington ...

Q: Around the world.

WEISZ: ... to Delhi. We were escorted to a hotel by I don't remember whom. It was sort of a fairyland experience to be driven from the airport to the Friends Colony Hotel at two or three a.m. along a road of little huts and strange odors emanating from God knows where. Ruby Purnell, the social welfare attaché, telephoned the next day and asked would I like to join her so she could show me a little bit of the area around what I thought was a mall but turned out to be Khan market where you buy fruits and vegetables. She just drove me around, and we talked. I just had never been treated so royally.

The following night there was a reception after work where a group who may have been from the Labor office of the Embassy were gathered on somebody's lawn, and someone

asked me, “Where will you be living?” and I replied, “Oh, I live halfway to Agra” because I felt the Friends Colony, in a residential area, was so far away from the Embassy. Even though we passed seven or eight other residential areas, it seemed halfway to Agra. At that point all the Indian ladies started to laugh and I asked, “What’s so funny about that?” At first they wouldn’t tell me. Then, upon urging, I learned that if you say “halfway to Agra” it means you’re on the way to the insane asylum!

At that point, three days old in Delhi, I began to realize how language has an important place -- we think we’re speaking English, we are speaking English, but English to an Indian is a very different language from English of an American. So, another lesson learned.

Q: Did you ever say it again? (laughter)

WEISZ: I never said it. As a matter of fact, I was very happy at Friends Colony: we had lovely neighbors, it was just a good experience out there. I think the first weekend we were invited to Ambassador Chester Bowles’s to a luncheon welcoming us to the Embassy. There again the whole idea of being welcomed by the Ambassador and his wife at Roosevelt House was a very awe-inspiring experience for a kid from the Bronx. (she laughs)

Q: You’d come a long way!

WEISZ: That’s right. And it wasn’t I who’d come a long way, I just married a most wonderful man who had come a long way, and I joined in his achievements. As I think back to all the wonderful things that happened in India and I relate them -- I could pick the most wonderful 500 -- they’re all related to something involving Morris Weisz.

Q: Was this a team? You feel part of a team?

WEISZ: Well, there was never a trip that he took that he didn’t say, “Would you like to join me?” So that going to the Nilgiris, going to Assam, going to Jamshedpur, meeting the extraordinary people working in all these areas of life, was better than reading a thousand travel books, because there I was in the midst of it all.

But I’m jumping the gun here. At the end of the first week, a committee of women, the American Women’s Club nominating committee, telephoned and asked if they might come and see me. They wanted to know whether they could nominate me as president of the Club. One week in India! Never having been a Foreign Service Officer’s wife... a simple schoolteacher... I’d never belonged to a women’s club ...and I said, “Are you sure you’ve come to the right Weisz? Mary Lou Weiss lives here too and she’s an old timer and I just came last week.”

Q: Amazing.

WEISZ: “I really think you came to the --” they left, thinking maybe they did come to the

wrong Weisz. (both laughing) Then I get a telephone call from somebody, who said, "no, you're the right Mrs. Weisz and we would like to nominate you as president of the Women's Club." The next thing I knew, there I was, president of the American Women's Club.

The very, very important thing that I want to bring to the fore is the fact that first, I called Marge Bunker, who was the vice president of the Club and who'd been active in clubs, it seems, all her life, and met with her and with Mary Ensminger, a past president of the Club, a Ford Foundation wife, I believe, and I asked, "What do I do?" Where do I go, what's the first step I take"?

Q: Did they tell you what the American Women's Club program was?

WEISZ: Yes. They gave me an annual report that Mrs.Ensminger had written on the Club's work and the direction it was taking. This was overwhelming. When I said, "What is the first thing that I do?" they responded, "Call the members of the Club and find chairmen who will serve as the board of the Club."

I didn't know anybody, having been there just a week. I charted the membership. We had military wives, AID wives, USIS wives, Peace Corps wives, Embassy wives, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Congressional people.

Q: Library of Congress wives.

WEISZ: So many wives! I made lists of people whose names I had but there were no faces attached to them. They didn't know me, I didn't know them, but they knew the American Women's Club. And the important thing that I discovered with every telephone call I made, starting with "You don't know me but I am your new president, would you serve as chairperson for this committee?" every phone call I made received a positive "yes" response. The women were waiting to be called, it was not my doing, they didn't know me, I had nothing to do with it except that I was at the other end of the telephone.

Here were a group of, oh, it must have been 400 women, who were waiting, each of them, to be asked to serve as chairperson and to use her ingenuity, which she did over the years, to carry on the work of the Club. So, as I think back, I continued to pursue my own interests, and even though I had the name "president of the Women's Club," every woman who was a chairperson was the president of the Club because she was running her division of the Club.

Q: Tell me some of the committee names. They did a lot of different things in the community, as well as publishing a magazine.

WEISZ: We published, first, the News Circle magazine, which required financing, so (1) we needed an editor, (2) we needed a publicity manager, and (3) we needed somebody who would help raise money -- an advertising committee. I chose a name from a list and I asked, "Would you be willing to go to the Indian community, or any community in India,

and ask them to put an advertisement in our magazine?" She said, "Don't fret, I'll do it, I'll be happy to do it." I said, "You would! You know, it's a very difficult job." And she said, "Lady, I used to sell used cars!" (hearty laughter) So, without knowing, I was able to find people from lists and any American woman I had chosen would have been as responsive and had ideas on the direction they wanted to move.

Then there was the household bank that gathered materials, so that when you first arrived you didn't have to look around for a strainer or a pot. Mrs. Bowles let us have a library in Roosevelt House so we could come to the most beautiful house in the world and read books and take books out. There was the servants registry, which not only had a roster of servants you could hire but X-rayed them, so there was a health program there. There were three immunization programs.

There was the membership committee, the hospitality committee, the program committee, the welfare committee, people who were keen on getting into the Delhi community and working with the different organizations in India: Signal Home, Holy Family College of Nursing, Lady Erwin College, Delhi School of Social Work -- I had my own roster of my own involvements. The Delhi Do was an informational booklet that was kept for people who wanted to come and do volunteer work but couldn't stay the year. There was the Scouts, the Brownies, the American Community Emergency Fund for Child Famine Relief on which I was asked to serve as co-chair. There was an Ikebana [flower arranging] exhibit to help arrange an American Christmas in Ikebana; so that here we were coordinating with the Japanese. The Indian Child Welfare Association, whose requests we met for library books. You could imagine (laughing) with 18 committees and so many women, we were involved in the entire city of Delhi, it seemed. The Christmas bazaar was to raise money to cover some of these activities. And Mother Teresa's orphanage in Old Delhi. The UNICEF program, the Holy Family Hospital Auxiliary to help with volunteers in a teaching program at the hospital for student nurses. The involvements go on and on.

Q: It was a wonderful club because it did so many useful things all over the city. Even the <u>News Circle</u> magazine was distributed to Americans as far as Rangoon and Calcutta and Nepal, and articles were written about what was going on and about personalities. I remember once a year there was an opportunity for the husbands to write articles.

WEISZ: And for the schoolchildren -- 17 American seniors participated in the creative writing context. I see here that Susan Weiss had an article on the death of Shastri, who was the prime minister. And there were poems -- Dan Perelli wrote a poem. The poem that won an award was by a young woman who wrote "Poem to Apollo." The excitement generated in this city because of -- what, Because of India? Because of the Embassy? Because of the Ambassador and his wife and their enthusiasm? Because of the many Americans who had the enthusiasm to participate in something more that was offered to them -- opportunities that none of us ever dreamed would be offered to us.

Let me go through some of these opportunities that I grabbed onto. The second week I was in Delhi, the American Women's Club received a letter from the principal of the

Child Guidance School for Difficult Children, Jagat Singh, who asked "Is there any American teacher who could come and assist our teachers in methods?" The children in his school were what he called "difficult." They were physically, some of them mentally, handicapped children.

I answered that letter because I had just come and here I was, a ready-made schoolteacher who had just left a school in some respects similar to the Child Health School without the former's financial resources. I found myself going to Jagat Singh's school. First he sat me down in his office and he asked, "Who are you? Tell me about --" just as I'm being interviewed here. He wanted to know who I was before he would allow an American into his school, what I believed, what direction I would take, why I wanted to work at his school. I said (she laughs), "You invited, so I came; that's why." He said, Come, I'll show you one of the classrooms."

We left his office, which was a cheerful, beautiful room and he took me into a room that had no windows, has an open bulb hanging from the middle of the ceiling, the walls seemed to be painted black. I said, "This is a classroom?" He looked at me -- I was absolutely appalled to discover this was a classroom. I came back to his office and I said, "Jagat Singh, you may never want to see me again but this I must tell you: you have a very beautiful office, the sun is shining, you've got flowers on the windowsill. You take me into a classroom where the children are and it's the black hole of Calcutta transferred here to the Child Guidance School." And he said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Go and look; you haven't ever seen." He went back, and he returned and said, "Oh my God." The next day he said, "You come back next week."

The next week that black hole was removed, the room was whitewashed, it did have windows and the sun was streaming in. I could see children -- I (laughing) hadn't seen any on the first visit. He said, "What other suggestions do you have?" I said, "Well, again I'm going to take the bull by the horns. If I were a child in this school, I would never tell anybody I came to this school because I was 'difficult.' The name of the school is a 'school for difficult children.' Would you be happy to tell somebody you went to a school for difficult children?" He said, "Well, they are difficult." I said, "Yes but (laughing again), you don't have to say it. You have to work with the difficult but you don't say it."

He changed the name. So, slowly -- he was a principal who was receptive to ideas. I have very little finesse when it comes to anger, and I think I was angry at the time to be confronted with all of these problems that seemed so surface, so simple -- to me they were simple but for him, he couldn't even see them --

Q: Well, at least he came out asking.

WEISZ: -- Jagat Singh asked that I meet with his teachers and talk about the method the American teacher uses in relating (l) to the children (2) to her colleagues (3) to the parents, to the principal "How does an American teacher do it?

The teachers asked for books. "We have to read, we have to read." So I said, "You know,

if you don't write, you can't read. I have been searching Delhi for books about schools for children with any kind of disability, and there are no books. I find thousands of books written by the Germans, by the French, by the British, by the Americans; nothing is written by the Indians. You are working with these children -- write! Write of your experiences, write of your successes, write of your failures and how you're able to correct the failures. But write!"

Well, it took many years, but write they did. In 1972 (I was no longer in India), I received in the mail from Jagat Singh a magazine called Growing Minds. It was the volume one, number four, March/April 1972: "A common sense approach to education, social welfare and family life." So it took a long time but at least something had evolved. The Indian school was writing about growing minds. Here's a copy of the magazine.

Q: Wonderful.

WEISZ: Carolyn Costanza, the wife of -- I don't remember his rank or who he was in the Embassy.

Q: I believe he was with Treasury.

WEISZ: She was a nurse. When I told her what I was doing, I asked, "Why don't you join me? Maybe you could be an assistant -- in some way use your nursing experience for the simplest things, although you can't do any physical therapy because you're not part of the schools." So she came to the School. There was one child who couldn't write, he had no strength in his muscles. Carolyn gave him a ball, which he could just keep grasping to strengthen his muscles. And lo and behold, it was beginning to work. So Carolyn got very excited about her involvement in the School.

She and I then went rather regularly once or twice a week. At one point when I think we were on a trip or it was a holiday or maybe the children were at home, I did not appear at the School and there was about a three-week hiatus. When I returned, I said to Jagat Singh, "We've been coming to the school for a long time and we want to know whether there is an impact, whether there is any validity to our continuing to come." He said, "This is a wonderful day for you to ask me this because I have a little boy who has never ever spoken. He speaks gibberish; nobody can understand what he says. When you arrived today, he saw your car approach, he ran into my office and for the first time in several years he spoke in Hindi an intelligible sentence: 'The ladies, they have come.' There," said Singh, "is your answer. You evidently have made an impact!" So we continued to go and I maintained contact with the school for the six years we were in India.

Q: Tell me the name of the school -- did he change the name of it?

WEISZ: The name was changed to "Child Guidance School" period. He just lopped off the "Difficult" phrase after a lot of talk about the need for books.

People became aware of my involvement with the Child Guidance School -- I don't know how they became aware but in India there seems to be a wonderful grapevine: news spreads. Before it's even news (she laughs), it has already spread. I received a telephone call from a woman who said that her handicapped child was receiving therapy at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences. They needed some guidance. There was a group of children who went to the hospital and it takes so much energy getting them to the Institute that they have no time for school. "Maybe you could come," they said, "and give us some advice."

I met with a group of middle-class Indian women and some men who were present. I introduced myself: "I'm an American, I'm here in India just a short while, and if I could be of any service, here I am. But I do not want to start the discussion. I want to hear what you have to say." They said, "Well, yes, we have to have a "mela", a fair, to raise money and with money we could buy land and with land we could build a school, and with a school our children could go to school."

I'm listening to this and I say (she laughs), "I hear what I hear but it's a very strange progression. Your children will be older than you are by the time you build the school! Your children needed the school yesterday, not tomorrow. You're taking the children to the hospital. It's a difficult journey; I know how difficult it is, having worked in American schools watching the children coming off the school bus in wheelchairs and the parents getting them ready for school, clothing children with all kinds of strange devices on their bodies."

"Why don't you ask the hospital for a room and set up a school right there?" Well, their first response was, "They'll never give us a room, it's a hospital." I replied, "You know, if you don't ask, you'll never get. How do you know they won't give you? This is the All India Institute of Medical Science, you're 'all-India' and you're bringing the children to the hospital. It seems very logical that the children remain there and get their education."

The parents asked for a room and they got a room. They established the school: the Kiran Society and the Rehabilitation Unit of the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences. And this little school was not only where I worked with Mrs. Jacobs, the teacher. It was a school where the doctors could observe their methods of rehabilitating the children, so that it became a very useful tool for the doctors as well as for the children. So everybody was benefiting.

My only involvement with the school was to come whenever Mrs. Jacobs felt she needed a little assistance and give her some guidance. But I don't speak Hindi, unfortunately -- well, maybe fortunately -- because had I spoken Hindi (laughing), I would have been more involved; and I think the less involved… The dropping of an idea and the germination of the idea is far more important than involvement.

Q: Well, if they pick it up, and they obviously did, and they were very receptive.

WEISZ: Well, they were receptive. Then came a telephone call from a doctor, Dr.

Ahluwalia, in Safdarjang Hospital. “You set up a school in All-India, and we are across the street in the people’s hospital. The All-India is a very posh hospital. It gets its finances from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation and a British group, and we get nothing because we are a family-oriented, working-class -- farm workers children come to our hospital for their needs, and because they are farm workers they have to live in the Hospital. Will you set up a school?” I said, “I didn’t set up the school; I just came with a few bright ideas, and (laughing) they weren’t so bright, they were just ideas. The Indian people carried the ball: they created the school. He said, “Well, our parents cannot do this; you can’t take an Indian farmer out of a village and ask them to set up a school, so can you do something?” I said, “Well, in the Sharp Health School at home we had what is called a ‘visiting instruction corps,’ where the teachers would visit the home of the child who wasn’t mobile. Maybe we could train some Indian teachers to do bedside teaching in the Hospital.” And that program evolved.

Q: That was the first of its kind, wasn’t it.

WEISZ: The first that I know of, but there it was. Things sort of happen when you drop the germ of an idea and people are receptive, and they are receptive in India. They’re a beautiful, warm, wonderful people who gravitate to anyone with an idea who will give a helping hand, because they realize they need a helping hand, the realization is there.

Anyway, I can’t believe there were so many. The Silver Jubilee TB Hospital: how did I get involved with that? I don’t know how, really!

Q: It sounds as though one led to another.

WEISZ: The social worker, Bala, at the Silver Jubilee TB Hospital in Old Delhi telephoned me and said to me, “Our women who are no longer tubercular and have no place to go sort of stay around the hospital grounds. They’re not contagious, so you could come and stay with them. They embroider on napkins and tablecloths.” I said, “What do you do with these things?” Bala said, “We don’t know what to do them; we need somebody to take them off our hands.”

So I said to Bala, “What if you and I go to Connaught Circus, into one of the big shops and talk to the boss, and see what he will do.” So we went, we walked into his shop, I asked to see the owner.

Q: This is a crafts shop of some kind?

WEISZ: It sold linens and things, anything of fabric sizes. As I took out these napkins to show the owner, he says, “Lady, I have a godown [storeroom] full of stitching; I don’t need any more, I don’t want any more, I don’t do charity.” I said, “Nobody said anything about charity. We’re going to make you very rich because you’re going to take these embroideries, and you’re going to sell them because we’re going to advertise this to the international community through the Women’s Club Newscircle. Every American is going to come to this shop and buy these wares, and you’ll get free advertising, and these

will sell like hotcakes and you'll become wealthy. And you will give a little bit of that wealth to the women in TB hospitals who need a little bit of money for hair oil. They have no money, and nobody gives people money who sit and stitch when they have nobody to market things for them. You will be the link."

He heaved a sigh but he always came back for more stitching. So that program evolved, too. It was just very simple: walking into a store and asking a man to help market linens.

Q: But you had the idea and you went ahead with it.

WEISZ: Bala then took the responsibility. She was involved in it and she learned how to market the embroidered linens for the women of the TB hospital. Anyway, that was just another success. There wasn't a thing that happened there (she laughs) that wasn't a success.

Q: You had the right approach. You were doing it gently, you weren't forcing ...

WEISZ: Half the problem was that I didn't know what I was doing (both laugh heartily). The American Women's Club -- because I had never been a member of a club -- the women knew what had to be done. I had time for all these other involvements. Things just seemed to evolve.

Q: When we were in India the leadership of our Embassy, Ambassador Bowles and his wife, and the right political feeling between our two countries, was quite inspiring. "Steb" Bowles was very active as a social worker, as a teacher of literacy and so on. She was an inspiration, a fine example to most of us.

WEISZ: There's no doubt, had there not been a foundation laid by these wonderful people, (1) the Indo-American relation at a peak, (2) we had the biggest aid ...

Q: A huge American presence.

WEISZ: The biggest AID program, the biggest Peace Corps contingent in the world -- it was welcomed with open arms. In every corner of India the American involvement was such that we all benefited by it. It was a great world experience for us. It's true: the Bowles laid the foundation on which we had entrée into these fantastic avenues of achievement. Because I couldn't achieve anything like this -- who would think to call an American teacher? Nobody called me in Paris (laughter); in Australia, nobody called me anywhere. But in India the phone was always ringing -- it was also tapped.

I went shopping one day in the heat of Indian summer and I crawled into a taxi, eager to go home, carrying two or three bundles. I just fell into that taxi, and halfway home it occurred to me I hadn't told the driver where to go. I said, "Where are you going?" He said, "I'm taking you home." I said, "How do you know? I didn't tell you," and he said, "Memsahib, we all know where you live." (laughter) Here, a taxi driver in India, and "we all know where you live..."

Anyway, here is a Nari Nekaten story. It could have been a wonderful success story. Nari Nekaten is an organization -- I think Mother Teresa is its founder -- a social welfare institution that takes "fallen women." Generally young girls who have children out of wedlock are thrown into the well; they're a blight to the family and the society. Nari Nekaten is a religious group of trained social workers and sisters who go out on the street and pick up women who are thrown out of their homes because they are pregnant or have already had a child -- an unwed mother. They keep them alive and well.

Over a period the Sisters of Mercy would arrange marriages for these young women. How? They do research on a man who wants to puja, who wants to get closer to his god and enter the gates of Heaven, who will do the greatest deed in his life: marry a "fallen woman." But the social worker has to check and recheck that this man is not going to put her on the street to be a prostitute. Nari Nekaten is an organization that, as far as I know, exists nowhere else in the world. Marriages are arranged so their lives can continue and blossom in society.

When then Vice President Nixon and his wife Pat came to Delhi, I was asked if I had any ideas about where Mrs. Nixon could go. I thought, "By God, Nari Nekaten, is the place to show Mrs. Nixon what is being done in the so-called "developing" part of the world. India has "developed" to the point where they have scored in an area that is so vital to the life of so many young women.

Q: Did they take Mrs. Nixon?

WEISZ: The FBI said I had to take them: four FBI men. Because I knew where it was I drove these four FBI advance men, who were checking it out, telling them all about Nari Nekaten. It was then decided that it couldn't be "secured." I said, "What are you talking about? It's secure enough for me and my life is just as valuable to me as Mrs. Nixon's is to the Vice President. Nobody ever thought it was not 'secure'." I said, "We don't have to make a big hullabaloo about it; just have her come and see and learn of something that is so vital, something that I felt, when I discovered it, was a whole new world."

Q: What was the outcome?

WEISZ: Nothing. They wouldn't approve. Pat never got to see Nari Nekaten and could never share the concept with anybody. Had she been able to, had they allowed her to come… I said, "With you four men you're strong enough to BE security!" They said, "It's more than that, Mrs. Weisz." Anyway, that was one of the failures in Indo-American relation.

Our Club was involved in '67 in the American Community Emergency Fund for Famine Relief. We were not alone. The U.S. Government, the CARE representative, and the American Women.

Q: This was following some natural disaster?

WEISZ: Yes. There was a drought. For years it hadn't rained. Something happened to the monsoon: it didn't come, it went elsewhere and nothing would grow. There was need not only for food but money to buy food. There was a big famine relief. And I got involved in that as a co-chairperson of the famine relief.

Voice of America interviewed Carolyn Costanza and me about the child guidance school and I have here a copy of the interview by Rami Chadra. The interview is titled, "Crossing Another Barrier." The lead-in was, "Kindness is a universal language and here's the story of two American women who have discovered that the time and kindness extended by them to underprivileged Indian children in Delhi is an exciting and fulfilling experience."

Q: What a nice tribute to you!

WEISZ: That was Voice of America. And then we come to… (she is reviewing papers) I don't know, there are so many others. Oh: the Nilgiri Hills, the tea plantation. These children who are singing -- (she sings) "The hills are alive/With the sound of music" -- it's because Molly Sholes and I thought we were alone. There I was, singing "The hills are alive" and all of a sudden the hills became alive. Little children seemed to come out of the tea leaves or something and started to follow us as we were walking and singing.

I stopped and said, "Why don't you sing along with me?" I don't think they understood a word I said but I stopped and mouthed "the hills" and the children responded, "the hills." The next thing I knew, they were walking with us singing "The hills are alive/With the sound of music." I expect that one day a sociologist will go to the Nilgiris and wonder how these children in the far-away hills in the tea plantation learned to sing this song. (she laughs)

Q: That happened to me in Okinawa, where the children were singing, "Today is Monday." I think the missionaries had taught them how to sing.

WEISZ: Here is a greeting card with the names of the children in one of the schools: the name isn't given and having been involved in so many schools I don't recall its name.

Q reads: "May all good fortune be with you."

WEISZ: Oh, I failed to tell you about Alankrit. You see this furniture in the house here? Lovely teak furniture. I went to a "mela" [fair] at the British Embassy. I walked in, and saw beautiful furniture that seemed to have come out of a miniature painting from India. I met Pushpa Talwar and I said, "How do you do, I'm Yetta Weisz of the American Embassy. I think these pieces of furniture are the most beautiful things I have ever seen."

Q: These were reproductions?

WEISZ: Of the Mogul Indian furniture. All hand hewn, it seems -- I didn't know much

about furniture. And she said, “I designed it.” I said, “You designed this furniture?” She said, “Yes, because I wanted such a chair when I saw it in a Mogul painting. So I hired a man, we bought wood, and on my “barsati”, the roof of my house, he made a chair. All the people who saw the chair said, ‘Pushpa, make me one.’ My husband said, ‘Well, if you’re going to make a lot of chairs for a lot of people, why don’t you go into the business?’

“So this is the first time I put it in the mela, the sale at the British Embassy, and I would sell it if somebody would buy it.” I said, “Guess what? I’m going to be your first customer if you will sell me these chairs. My son was just married and since he studied in Benares and this is Indian furniture designed and made by an Indian, it’s the perfect wedding present.” She said, “Well, you could buy it but you cannot take it away until the end of the fair, because maybe somebody else will like it and they’ll place an order.”

Well, the next order came from Bloomingdale’s! And they gave an order to the point that Alankrit -- this was when we were there in the 70s -- is now part of a center called “The Okhla Industrial Estate.” They are building small industries that used to be cottage industries, evolving into small industries bringing foreign exchange into India, and Pushpa was able, together with her husband, who left the Indian government, to open up their well-equipped furniture shop, a thriving business.

Q: I think that’s where we went and put an order in.

WEISZ: Oh you bought some of Pushpas’s furniture. We became fast friends, she’s a fascinating woman, who has all kinds of fantastic ideas of using Indian fabrics in a special way and creating design and color and harmony of purpose, and bringing foreign exchange into the country.

That was another success. I had nothing to do with it except that I bought it. I recognized it as something quite beautiful.

Here is a letter that I picked out only because of this extraordinary phrase here. Maniben Kara was the president of the Western Railway Employees Union. Because of my husband’s work as Labor Counselor and his willingness and enthusiasm to invite me to accompany him on all these fantastic trips, I met the railroad workers, the dockworkers; I went to the docks in Bombay, I visited ships, I saw the workers working. We went to Jamshedpur, the Jesuit school where my husband and I stayed with 13 Jesuit priests in one building. (she laughs)

My husband encouraged me to share in his exciting ventures. We visited an “Adivasi” [social class] village where the Jesuit father, Father Bogert was telling us that they had established a slab of glass over an acre, it seemed, of land in order to have that wonderful hot Indian sun generate electricity that would then draw water from the lower depths of this area up to the fields. There was a slab of glass -- you’ve never seen anything like it -- in a village, and the Adivasi are one of the very poor in Bihar, one of the very poor states in India.

This Jesuit father was able to work with a French team who came to India to establish an extraordinary solar energy device. These Adivasi village women have a clubhouse, and they drink tea in the middle of the day. They have no shoes but they drink tea. The children have a school. How did this evolve?

Father Bogert said that when they first set up this thing, the village women were very angry and he learned that they were planning to throw rocks on this device so they could then continue to go to their watering well. The well was the meeting place of the women…

Q: In every village!

WEISZ: …in every village. And here there was no longer any reason to go to their well: the water was coming up fast and furious because of this device; so they were going to destroy it. Father Bogert called a meeting and said, "You don't have to destroy the device. If you want to have a meeting place we'll set up a clubhouse." So, here in the poorest of the poor, at 12 noon you could find a group of Adivasi women drinking tea, sharing gossip that they used to share at the well, now sharing at the clubhouse. The children have a school because of the water. This is the most extraordinary thing that's happened in this very poverty-ridden area of India.

Q: That's a wonderful story.

WEISZ: Isn't that a beautiful story?

Q: And they didn't have to carry their water in…

WEISZ: And Father Bogert is not an American, he's a Belgian. In Jamshedpur there is a social welfare/labor officer school. The letter came to my husband's desk asking would the American AID or somebody in America give assistance to a group of Jesuit fathers who want to establish a school to train labor officers. The law in India requires that every company having more than 50 workers have a labor officer, but labor officers need training.

So the Jesuit fathers said if they could have a school they could train these officers. That letter was sent from my husband's desk to Chester Bowles's desk, and Ambassador Bowles agreed it would be a good idea. So a school was built and that school is where a large group of Jesuit fathers are teaching and living and where we were invited. The people come from far and wide. Jamshedpur is a steel-manufacturing city. Some of the big steel manufacturing areas are not too far north of Calcutta.

Our journey to the school was a bit difficult. I remember we were riding a train that looked like Toonerville Trolley and all of a sudden there was a sharp stop. "Why are we stopping?" The tracks disappeared! (she laughs) Somebody had just removed the tracks between Jamshedpur and Calcutta. Somebody got angry at the railroad and took away the

tracks. Anyway, they were restored; we did get to Jamshedpur. These bizarre things that happened -- when you think about it in retrospect, we could have -- (she laughs) the story would never have been told had the car not stopped.

Back to Maniben Kara: Maniben, as I said, was the president, a wonderful woman, president of the Western Railway Employees Union. She writes, "My dear Yetta and Morris: It's not often that…" She starts out about friendship and all, and says, "I'm sending you a variety of mangoes. They're a variety of Bombay type with pointed nose. This quality is soft, sweet and tender like a woman. (laughter) If you can take out the juice by first pressing and softening the mango with the skin on, and put the juice through a blender, without the stone, you have a perfect mango juice dish. If necessary, mix with milk, put it in the freezer, and enjoy ice cream." Now, this is a letter from Maniben Kara, who is president of the toughest trade union in all of India, the Western Railway Employees Union. And here she's sending me this letter about a mango which she compares to a soft woman.

Well, here I'll quote one last letter. A letter was received by Ambassador Kenneth Keating -- we spanned both Keating and Bowles -- saying, "I have lost touch with my daughter. She is married to a Dutchman, she's having a baby, she's out in a village called Nangaloi, and we don't know where she is. Her baby was due and we don't know if she's had the baby or if she's dying. Where is our daughter? You are in India, we are in California." Signed by a Mrs. Hogan.

I don't know anything about Elizabeth not being in touch with her mother. Our Lucy, when she graduated from American International School, went to University of Wisconsin but every year returned to India to be with her parents and do service to India. She was living in this village Nangaloi through the auspices, I think, of the Christian Agency for Social Action (CASA). One day Lucy comes home to take (laughing) her shower, and said, "Mama, Elizabeth is having a baby and if she has that baby in Nangaloi, it's not going to live."

I said, "Tell her when she has the baby to come directly from the birthing place to our house and I'll call the Embassy for a crib." So I got a crib -- nobody asked me why I needed a crib -- and it was set up, the rooms were set up, and the mother, father and baby moved in. I'm sitting at the swimming pool and I hear Dick Viets say, "I can't find these people." Dick became an Ambassador later but at this time he was an assistant to Ambassador Keating, and he hunted high and low for a person named Elizabeth.

I said, "Are you looking for Elizabeth?" -- I don't even remember her second name -- and he said, "Yes, do you know anything about her?" I said, "Of course. She's living in my house." He said, "Well, why didn't you speak up?" I said, "I was only doing my duty, I don't go around advertising every time I do a good deed" (laughing heartily), "otherwise I'd be advertising all the time." Ambassador Keating had written to Mrs. Hogan who lives in California, "One of the Consuls in the Embassy informs me that your daughter and her husband are frequent visitors at the Dutch Embassy." However, Dick didn't know from the Dutch Embassy how to find them. The last paragraph says, "If I wore a crown in

India, Yetta Weisz would certainly be one of the major jewels in it. She and her husband are two of the best and most effective Americans representing this country overseas that I have ever known. As your daughter may have written you, they are in the United States on a brief holiday but are expected back."

Q: That's a wonderful tribute to you.

WEISZ: Then evidently Mrs. Hogan heard from her daughter and wrote, "Dear Ambassador Keating: I'm not accustomed to writing heads of government of foreign states, nor indeed of my own, but I've been encouraged to take this unusual step by people who know India and because in my own travels I have found our Embassy and Consular representatives to be helpful in times of trouble. My daughter is still a citizen of the United States and we are pleased to note that so will her child be, though the father is Dutch and its natal place India. We of course expect no intervention in this small matter on your part. It is obviously a detail to be dealt with in some cranny of a tourist bureau, unless Mrs. Gandhi can and will answer my appeal.

"My daughter has written to me of a Mrs. Weisz, whose husband is attached to the Embassy and who has very kindly offered my daughter the use of her home for a brief time after the baby is born. For this wonderful act of good will my husband and I are profoundly grateful. If you know this good woman," (laughing) "please express to her our gratitude."

Well, I'm very happy that Mrs. Hogan is happy. We have extended hospitality to all kinds of young people who came to India for whatever reason. I've had an artist who went to see the Maharishi because he knew that the Beach Boys were up at the Maharishi's ashram. He was going to sell musical instruments to them, and he got sick outside. The Maharishi wouldn't let him into the ashram. He was in Holy Family Hospital. How do I get involved with him? I'm in the commissary and there is a young woman who is wearing a costume right out of Arabian Nights. I said, "You don't look like a Peace Corps volunteer because they're not allowed into the commissary and I've never seen you before. Are you brand new? Should I welcome you?"

She said, "I'm brand new but I'm not to be welcomed because I'm only here because my husband is a veteran and I'm allowed to buy him some food. He's sick in the hospital." So I said, "My God, what happened?" And she tells me his story. I said, "Where are you staying?" She said, "I'm at the Y, but I only have enough money for tonight. I don't know where I'm going to be tomorrow." So I said, "Well, why don't you save your money tonight and come stay at my house." She said, "But I don't know you." I said, "Well, that's all right, I don't know you. The house doesn't belong to me: it's an American Embassy house and it's your house as well as mine. So you're welcome to come and stay. You're fortunate because we live in Friends Colony not far from Holy Family Hospital, so you could even walk to the hospital."

She said, "Well gee, I don't know; I'd better ask my husband if I'm allowed to do that." I said, "It seems to me if you haven't got any money to stay anywhere you'd better be

allowed to do that because I don't know where else to ask you to stay." She came home with me.

Q: Was she an Indian?

WEISZ: No, American. Both were, from California. She came and she stayed and then the husband was released in our custody from the hospital because he was too sick to travel and needed to recuperate. We were scheduled for home leave and I told her, "He'd better start recuperating fast because we have to close up the house." Anyway, he did recuperate fast and years later we saw films of some of his work. There were so many, many children who came to India who had stars in their eyes but didn't know how to boil water.

Q: Didn't know how to manage living in India.

WEISZ: And we only managed because -- you talked about the servants registry and how we worked with the servants: we hired a group of servants who then sat at a meeting with me, and all I said was, "We are here to love and enjoy and learn India and it's your job to keep us healthy and happy. Because if we are not healthy, we're going to be shipped home and you'll be unemployed. You don't want to be unemployed, so you're going to keep us well. You're going to boil the water, you're going to keep the house clean, and we're all going to be a happy family." And I never told them what to cook or what to do or how to do it. The house ran itself

Q: This is Mary Lou Weiss at [the] home of Yetta Weisz filing the second segment of an interview with her.

WEISZ: I thought last evening of the interview that Morris Weisz had with Hazel Sokolove, the wife of one of the first Labor Attachés to India. Hazel talked in her interview about an Indian lady, Prem Berry, who asked Hazel to accompany her on a shopping trip in order to set up a shop which is known now as Cottage Industries. Cottage Industries is *the* shop that the whole world comes to to make purchases in India. We released this story of Hazel and again I reflected on the role I and all the women I knew who accompanied their husbands to this exotic new land had, and on the adjustments we had to make.

Our husbands came with a program of their own, going from one office in Washington or wherever to another office in Chanakyapuri (neighborhood in New Delhi where [the] U.S. mission is located). The women came with hardly any orientation.

We were thrust into a whole new life that we had to adjust to and make our own path. We had no office, we had a home, we had our children; and once the family unit was established, where do we go, what do we do? And so we discover that many of the women embark on ventures that have been part of their life wherever they were previously -- the writers continue to write, the teachers continue to teach, as we discovered in the first part of the interview. But making a place for yourself where you

can be happy and involved is the strength of every one of our Foreign Service women. I marvel at how we're able to adjust to the many, many changes that had to come about in our lives.

I'm now going into some of the incidents as I recall them from looking at letters that I received and photographs that have accumulated over the years. I was the chairperson for the Humphrey-Muskie Committee for Americans Abroad. Mailings went out requesting contributions for the Democratic candidates, and I felt that it was my place -- I was a political person, I was not hired by the State Department, so I felt secure that I could be involved in something as important as a political venture.

So the letters went out. The Indian newspapers -- I don't know how they learned of the letters -- interviewed me and then Indian rupees from Indians started to come into the coffers. I didn't know what to do with Indian rupees, and the Treasury Attaché said, "You can't send those rupees out." So I had to return all the rupees to the Indians who'd made their contributions. That was an eye-opener and an interesting experience: Americans abroad and foreign nationals showing their interest in the presidential campaign.

Another vignette: On a trip from Delhi to Calcutta, the plane, one of those little two-engine things with only one propeller, was completely occupied. In the front seat sits a woman everybody is in awe of, Mother Teresa, and she's sitting alone. As we overfly many, many miles of India, I thought how I would love to sit with her. She said she'd be happy to have some conversation, and we talked about the many things that Indian nuns were doing in Delhi, because I could talk of nothing else but Delhi, I had not lived in any other city. And then after lunch had been served Mother Teresa said to the steward, "Do you have any food left over?" He said, "Oh, of course, Mother, if you're still hungry you may have some more food." She said, "Oh no, not for me, I'm not hungry any longer; I just want some food so when I get off the plane and the Sisters in Calcutta greet me, I will have a gift for them." The steward said, "But we haven't any packing materials." And Mother Teresa said, "Never mind, I have this" (laughing), and she produces some empty boxes that were crushed, and bags, and the steward fills them with food.

The plane lands in Calcutta, and you know how eager you are to get off an airplane after you've been sitting for hours -- people had jumped out of their seats before landing. I got up, stood in the aisles, and I'm no little woman, so I blocked the aisle, and I wouldn't allow anybody to rush ahead. I said, "Mother Teresa, will you please leave so that the passengers could leave?" She said, "Oh, I thought I would wait until they all left, because I can only walk slowly." I said, "You walk as slowly as you wish and I will not allow anyone (she laughs) to stampede you." She laughed and she blessed me and off she went.

Labor Day: This is another. I have a photograph of me standing in the receiving line with Chester Bowles at Roosevelt House. My husband was in Japan at the time at some very important meeting and there I was, responsible for the Labor Day function, i.e., the Labor Office was responsible and I was asked to serve. "Steb" Bowles was also out of town, so there were Ambassador Bowles and the Labor Attaché's wife standing in the receiving line.

The reason I relate this is that Ambassador Bowles was very surprised that so many, many Indians embraced me with affection and warmth, and that he was not aware that an American woman [could] be so close to so many Indian trades union leaders and their wives. Indians rarely bring their wives to functions. In this case the wives were all present, and Ambassador Bowles asked, "How do you know all these people?" And I said, "Well, they come to our home to luncheons and discussions and camaraderie; I met them at union functions."

Q: Had you met some of them during your travels?

WEISZ: On the travels, wherever. That's the wonderful thing about the life of this Labor Officer whom I've been married to for 57 years. There was never any doubt that I would not accompany him. It was important that we both go, that we both be involved. And so this reflects all of the work that I did in India.

Another incident is linked to a photograph that I have here of an Indian wedding. The first week I had been at the guidance school I met the teachers there and I didn't know too much about India. I'd only been there two or three weeks when we received an invitation to a wedding. My husband said, "Oh, this man, I think, is a member of one of the trade unions I met at a function and that's probably why we're invited to the wedding." We come to the wedding and my husband doesn't know anybody there. I look around and there are all the teachers of the Child Guidance School. One of them was married to a trade unionist who had met my husband and she'd thought it was so much fun to have an American invited. We were the only foreigners at this wedding and it was a joy to be close to these wonderful people and have them feel close to us. Close enough to invite us to a very important function in their lives.

In this photograph I'm wearing a sari. Why? Early on I was president of the Women's Club. I was invited to a function, I think it was at the Modern School, in a large auditorium. There were no foreigners except myself, all Indians. The stage was set for the honored guest. Not knowing I was an honored guest, I took my seat in the rear of the auditorium, and the next thing I know a young Indian woman runs up. I must join her and go up to the stage.

Well, I went up on the stage and all the Indian ladies are wearing their saris, beautifully draped, and I'm wearing the American fashion, a mini-skirt!. (laughter) There I am, sitting before hundreds of people, feeling exposed. I was absolutely embarrassed to the core. At that point I said to myself, "Never again will I be caught with these two legs exposed like this," and I learned how to wear the sari.

That in itself is a tale, because the next week Alice Cook was one of the guest lecturers from the Cornell University. She was programmed by USIS and we went to Agra together. At dinner I said, "Alice, I'm going to try something new -- nobody's ever taught me how to wear the sari but I'm going to put it on. I'll use a ruler to make the pleats and do all the things I think the Indians do naturally, since I don't know how to do it. But I'm

going to wear the sari at dinner time." We're sitting in a restaurant in Agra, and while we're dining I notice an Indian lady at another table staring at me, and I said to Alice, "I think we'd better hurry up and finish our dinner, I must have put this on wrong."

After dinner we hurried out and the Indian lady hurried out behind me and grabbed me by the arm and said, "What's the matter? You do not recognize me?" I said, "I'm sorry." I'm a stranger there, I didn't know that I should have known this lady, and I tried to apologize. And she said that as soon as I'd started to talk with my New York accent she said, "Ohhh! You are not a Parsi lady from Bombay." And I said, "No, I'm a Jewish lady from the Bronx!" (laughter) At that point we sat together and talked. I said, "I thought you thought I didn't know how to wear the sari, but if you thought I was a lady from Bombay then I must know how to wear it! I'm just grateful to you."

She too was a teacher in Agra and I looked very much like someone she knew in Bombay. And I guess wearing the sari, and being tanned from the Indian sun I could pass as an Indian. I continued to wear the sari to important functions where I would not feel uncomfortable.

Did I relate the tale about Indian taxis and my trip to cottage industries? For our first year in India we had no vehicle. Our car purchased in the States was shipped in the States and we were told that in unloading it fell into the Bay. We had to order another car, and for a year I rode taxis wherever I had to go.

Q: You mentioned a scooter ride when a man took you to Friends Colony and you marveled at how he knew where you lived.

WEISZ: Yes, this is how the taxi drivers all knew me. I didn't know that, but one day I was shopping at the Cottage Industries that Hazel Sokolove helped establish and it was so-o-o hot. With packages, et cetera et cetera, I board the taxi and the driver starts off. Halfway home it occurs to me to ask, "Where are you going? I forgot to tell you where to go." The driver said, "Memsahib, we all know you," and without my telling him he took me all the way out to Friends Colony, because I had been using taxis and they all knew my destination. The grapevine in India is a fantastic one. If you go out to Karolbagh, a working-class neighborhood, and work in the schools, they all know it, and they all know what you do in Cottage Industries.

I have a photograph taken by Molly Sholes in Assam, wife of a USIS Officer. She is a great photographer. That photo shows me sharing a photo of my children with a woman just coming out of a mud hut. She carried a baby in a cloth strapped to her back and each hand was holding a little child. I went down into a sort of ditch and said, "Hello." She looked at me, smiling because she didn't understand I couldn't speak whatever the language is in Assam.

I always "carry my children" wherever I go so I (laughing) don't forget them. I showed her a photograph of them and she smiled, as you can see in this photo. The sharing was so beautiful that I found myself taking the necklace I was wearing and putting it around her

neck. Then I "Namasted" (gestured with raised hands, palms together) and left. That was the meeting with this very, very beautiful Assam woman and her children, and a little bit of sharing.

An incident at the American Women's Club: I came early to help set up the monthly meeting and a young woman comes to me and says, "I have a great problem and I don't know what to do." "Well, I don't know whether I can help you but I'll listen to your problem." She said, "I have three little children, one, two, three, and I feel the need to be home with them, yet I want to be part of doing something in India. I don't know what to do."

I said, "Well, with three little children if I were you --" just off the top of my head, "I'd stay home and learn how to play the sitar." Now, as anyone who knows can tell you, it's the most difficult instrument for a Westerner to play because we don't sit the way a sitar player has to sit. It's more the sitting and holding the sitar than playing the instrument itself.

Q: Isn't the musical scale or the tonal range or something different?

WEISZ: I know nothing about it. All I do know is, at the end of the year at the yearly meeting, a young woman came up to me and said, "How did you know?" "How did I know what?" because I didn't remember -- you know, you say something off the top of your head. "How did you know I'd be able to play the sitar? It is such an exciting experience. I have a sitar teacher. I'm learning to play the sitar. And I'm home with my children."

Q: Wonderful -- maybe happier than if she'd gone to the club meetings all year long.

WEISZ: Or been involved in something that took her away from home. This was something she could do and learn. These are little vignettes... One of meeting Coretta King at the Roosevelt House.

Q: Tell us about that.

WEISZ: It was just a meeting. "Steb" Bowles was always having fantastic visitors: Coretta was one. I don't recall the occasion. I have only the photograph, of my shining face and her shining smile; we're shaking hands and Steb standing and admiring both of us, or at least Coretta.

Another Labor Day: Joan Dine led a chorus of Foreign Service Officers and wives in Roosevelt House in singing American labor songs. (Here again my husband had managed to be out of town.) The entire floor of Roosevelt House was covered with humanity. We were packed in beautifully, with everybody involved in anything of interest to labor invited, and Indians flocking in from every Indian trade union. When the singing ended and it was time to say, "thank you, au revoir and goodnight," the German labor attaché, the Swedish labor attaché, the British labor attaché, each one came to me separately and

said, “This is the most remarkable experience. We who come from Socialist countries have never been able to put on a Labor Program singing such fantastic labor songs as you have done here in Roosevelt House. You even have the Ambassador’s wife a member of the chorus!” They were all absolutely amazed. Somehow, to me, it was the most natural thing in the world.

Q: And you had a lot of fun doing it.

WEISZ: Everybody had a lot of fun.

Q: Can you recall any of the titles of the songs? Some are quite familiar to many people; some are not.

WEISZ: “It Could Be a Wonderful World,” “Solidarity Forever,” and “The Union Makes Us Strong.” Another event that took place under Mrs. Bowles’s auspices was when a Labor Attaché conference was held in Delhi. Joe Glazer, the USIS Officer, came with his guitar and Mrs. Bowles rented -- a ruin. How do you rent a ruin? It was Haus Khas, a fantastic Moghul ruin, half walls, half rubble, and in the evening with the whole place lit up -- I don’t know how she got candles lighted throughout the ruin -- there we are in Haus Khas -- all the Labor officers, the Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz, his wife, Labor attachés from all over the world, plus the Indian nationals who were labor-oriented -- all entertained by Joe Glazer singing his songs about it could be a wonderful world. (she laughs) And it is a wonderful world.

Q: You obviously had a good time doing these [songfests] and they caught on.

WEISZ: Singing was so important. Indians, as far as I know, don’t sing at union meetings. I haven’t attended any in India, but we Americans do sing, we are a happy people.

I’d like you to go over this thing on top here (paper rattling). Oh, before I get into the next event there are some silly things I did, and I’m going to enumerate three of them.

We were asked to attend a meeting of the Political and Economic Officers’ wives. I think they took place once a month to share -- I don’t know what -- (laughter). I came to a meeting and as I entered I was given a nametag. I looked around the room and said, “Why do we need name tags? Everybody knows everybody, we’ve been together for years, it seems.” Somebody, perhaps our hostess Mrs. Wilson, said, “This is protocol, we seem to have forgotten there are ways of doing things. Put your name on a tag and wear it: there must be a reason for it.”

Well, this rebel saw no reason for it, so she writes “Gina Lollobrigida” on her tag and puts it on her blouse. Well, I didn’t know one new person was invited, and this young new person, I don’t know who she is, walks around looking at nametags. When she comes to mine and looks at me, she says, “How extraordinary.” And I say, “Well, my friends call me ‘Yetti’.” (general breakup). And we have a conversation about the

Women's Club, and life in India. And then the young woman goes to the next person, Jean Macias, and says, "I just had the most wonderful talk with Gina Lollobrigida." And Jean says, "WHO?" Anyway, we had a lot of fun with Gina Lollobrigida. Well, that was once where I was wrong and should have put my name down, but I was the rebel.

Another incident: It was a very cold day. I don't know why I was at the swimming pool, which was at the American Club behind the Embassy; I never swam, I just sat at the pool, a watcher. The only other human there (besides one on the diving board) was a woman. I turned to her, "My God, look at the fantastic physique on that man. I've never seen anything so perfect." She beamed and said, "Oh, I sleep with that fantastic person." I don't know who this man or who this woman is. The next thing I know, in the mail arrives a beautiful photograph of a brigadier general ...

Q: Autographed?

WEISZ: Oh yes. And I have it among my treasures. He's fully clothed and he's wearing all of his campaign ribbons. I guess he was the highest-ranking fellow there.

Another incident: "Steb" Bowles and I are coming home from some meeting. At the Ashoka Hotel there was an accident involving an Indian pedestrian and an Indian scooter, and a whole mob of people around. Steb says to her driver, "Please stop the car." She opens the door and ventures out into the mob. I say, "Steb, where are you going?" And she said, "I want to offer my services if I could be of help to this person who was hurt," and she goes into the crowd. I'm trailing behind, worried.

Q: And she's wearing her sari?-

WEISZ: She is; she always wore her sari. She carried herself beautifully, a very lovely woman. She offers her services in Hindi, people are saying that everything is under control, "Thank you, Mrs. Bowles," and as we walk out of the crowd towards her car, people are saying, "Thank you, Mrs. Bowles" (Y. says it in Hindi). And when we get into the car she says to me, "Isn't this marvelous? Everybody in India knows my name." And I say to her, "Steb, you're wearing your name tag." (breakup) Her face dropped. To me it was funny.

Another incident at the pool: There was always a meeting of the Political and Economic Officers at lunch at the swimming pool, and Marina, Dick Viets's wife, would bring Dick's lunch in a beautiful basket. She'd spread a lovely silk cloth and Dick would have a dish; things were served with silver serving spoons. We all came with little brown bags and 'Here's a sandwich --" everybody else had a sandwich, or had bought it at the snack bar.

But Dick had his lunch brought from home. Well, I decide enough is enough: nobody's going to outdo Yetti. So Yetti comes one day: she has an appointment to meet her husband, and she arrives with candlesticks, silver service, with the most elegant cloth and dishes. I spread these for the Labor Counselor to have his lunch... A sandwich, but he ate

with elegance.

Q: How did he take it?

WEISZ: Oh, we all laughed, it was funny. Those were some of the fun things we did. We played games because life could become too serious and it was important to maintain some kind of stability in our own little family group.

One of the silly things that I had nothing to do with was when the Humphrey-Muskie democrats lost and the Keating Republicans came into power. Ambassador Bowles left and Ambassador Keating arrived. Ambassador Keating has to present credentials to the President of India. We in the Embassy were given a directive: the wives will all wear hats and gloves. Who in India has a hat? (laughter) So in the photograph taken of the American Embassy staff and Officers, the men look absolutely elegant, the women have hats made of baskets. We all went to the bazaar, we bought baskets, we turned the baskets upside-down on our heads and we wore our "hats."

Q: And decorated them.

WEISZ: And decorated them with ribbons and God knows what. And gloves -- I had a pair of gloves because I had lived in Paris -- everybody in Paris has gloves -- so I share one of my gloves with a friend so we each can have a glove. We come to the Rashtrapati Bhavan (president's palace) for the presentation of credentials and all the Indian ladies are looking at us aghast. Here we are dressed to the nines in the hottest day of the year. We're wearing hats and gloves and long sleeves, we're covered to the hilt. And they're wearing their little blouse, the choli and their light silk sari. Quite a contrast.

Q: (laughing) You were representing America!

WEISZ: We were representing America with Indian baskets on our heads. And here's the photograph of Ambassador Keating and the DCM, Bill Weathersby, and the whole staff standing on the steps of Roosevelt House.

I have an article from an Indian newspaper. A few years before we left, a young man named Prabhu Chaudhary would come to the house and consult with me about schools and books and teachers. I kept thinking, "What does this kid want?" He just wants to sit and talk in an air-conditioned house, it seemed to me. So I was sharing all of my little knowledge. In '71, he telephoned, would I come to Janpath? There was an empty lot and it was no longer empty, it was full of tents. What were they? They were schools he had established after finally getting enough money to develop this school. It was temporary because it was on land it didn't own. I guess it was government land.

He set up this "tent township," he called it, right near Hotel Janpath, on one of the fashionable streets in Delhi. The school was for children of the waiters and the sweepers and the gardeners of the hotels, the taxi drivers' children, the dhobis' children and those of the domestic servants who worked in this posh area. And it was Prabhu Chaudhary

who established this Bal Vikas Project, which was financed with 11,000 rupees raised entirely through donations. He got money from Indian business people and had an idea, but it took years, finally, to evolve -- because I was in India from '65 to '71 and it seems that Prabhu Chaudhary was hanging onto the tail of my kite for years, questioning, wanting to know, learning. And lo and behold, the seed germinated and became this school.

In the afternoons he'd set up another type of school to instruct women in first aid, in hygiene, in sewing, in crocheting. Who'd want to teach an Indian how to crochet and sew? They do the most beautiful sewing! Anyway, he was doing it. These were the mothers of the workers in the area. It says in this article, "The Mahila Vikas Project which was open on every Tuesday has drawn an enthusiastic response from the wives of workers in the area. Between one and three, when they are comparatively free of domestic chores, the women come to the camp to learn a few useful domestic arts, watch an educational film show, receive a message of family planning" -- another very important project -- "and entertain themselves with songs and stories."

So that one never really knows when you plant a seed what will germinate. And I am thrilled with this little school that I had nothing to do with except to talk to the young man who established it.

Q: But you did because you made yourself available, when you didn't realize what it was.

WEISZ: But I had no idea that he was planning to do more than just be friendly and wanting to know, wanting to know... This was at the end of '71, the year we left India, in August.

Q: It must be very gratifying to you to realize that…

WEISZ: This whole experience has been more than gratifying, because we found ourselves -- I wrote in my outline here in "life after India" all the things that we did somehow caused us to return. We came back in '73, '76, and '79. We spent four months in India in '83 when Morris got a Ford Foundation grant. So there was this pull. We renew friendships and see the wonderful things that were continuing to happen in this country that sometimes took 20 steps forward and 21 back. (laughing) Sometimes you get that impression.

Anyway, after India, we had nine months in Washington where Morris did return to the State Department. I don't know what he was in the board of the Foreign Service. Then from '73 to '75 we were in Paris at the OECD, an international agency, Morris representing the U.S. in the Labor Office. Then 1-1/2 years in Australia where he taught at Monash University in Melbourne.

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Continuation of interview: August 20, 1992

Q: It is August 20, 1992, at the home of Yetta Weisz.

WEISZ: Thank you, Mary Lou, for returning for a second interview. As I recall and record incidents, it occurs to me that after six years in a country, daily occurrences lead to, for me, fantastic stories of parts of my life and my association with the Foreign Service.

I want to go back to the beginning orientation. I was a schoolteacher. I'd had to take a week's leave of absence because my spouse told me that we were embarking upon a whole new life, in India. We were living in Washington. I was teaching at the Sharp Health School. I took the week's leave from my teaching and went to the State Department, to be confronted with a program called Orientation that was either so overwhelming or I was not prepared for the mass of data that I was presented with in abstract; because I was not in India (laughing) and never ever had been.

Q: Was it about India?

WEISZ: It was only India. (pause) I think it was only India. But as I think of this orientation, as I lived in India, the pitfalls, the things that happened to me may have been -- well, they became funny incidents in my life but they need not have presented themselves as they did, and for me they were funny because I was an older woman; I was in my 50s by this time. And as I think of young women coming into the Department and confronting similar situations, they would not have thought it was funny, I don't believe.

One of the incidents is what I call the sari incident -- not "sorry" because it happened but the garment, because I was wearing the s-a-r-i. As I reported earlier, I always accompanied my husband on exciting trips and this was one, to an industrial cotton-manufacturing city. I don't know what the business association was called but Morris and I were invited to a dinner and I did not have a cotton sari. This was the center for the manufacture of cotton saris. Fast as a bunny, I ran out and bought a cotton sari. Come dinner time, all the women were dressed in the most magnificent silk saris. There I am in a peasant cotton sari.

I turned to the men, with women in the group, and said, "Your wives don't patronize your corporation!" And everybody laughed; it was a fun thing. But had I been aware, I'm sure I would not (laughing) have gone out to buy a cotton sari. I did what it was normal for an American to do but not what was normal for an Indian to do.

Q: Did someone then and there tell you or did you learn later that only the lower-class women wear cotton saris?

WEISZ: Well, I must have known it back in my mind but the whole idea never occurred to me at the time. It was more that I believe in fitting in. That's just one of the cultural differences: there were many, many of them where I was not comfortable. I think I have told about sitting on the platform with my mini-skirt at a meeting in a big auditorium

filled with Indians and the only foreigner, this American, is sitting on the platform with her legs exposed.

Q: And that's what made you want to wear a sari.

WEISZ: Yes. Those were difficult times for me. I felt those incidents didn't have to happen, and fortunately for me, I was older, and wiser maybe. However…

Q: You could laugh through some of these.

WEISZ: So the State Department orientation could be more meaningful. I don't know how one could change it, I only know that I was not really oriented to a way of life that was as foreign to me as day from night.

Q: Perhaps you were getting an area study. If you were getting an orientation on India, perhaps you weren't getting a different kind of an orientation.

WEISZ: Maybe it was an over-all orientation, because had it been specifically India, it would have talked about dress; maybe it wouldn't have. All I know is that I was not aware.

And also the fact that I was leaving all of my students for a week-- I am a dedicated teacher and I was leaving school, to take a quick orientation course. Who knows!

Q: When you arrived in India there was an orientation, was there not?

WEISZ: Yes, we took an orientation that had more to do with visits to a village, understanding the plight of the masses of the people rather than the individual association of one American to one Indian or a small group of Indian teachers or wives, Indians involved in whatever activities. This is an area I think needs to be looked into. I don't know how many other women have felt this need but I could have used…

Q: I'm sure we all could have, and we've all had embarrassing…

WEISZ: Among the beautiful things that happened in my association with young Americans who came to India to study in their junior year abroad program or other programs, two were in association with Indian artists. At the end of her junior year abroad program, one of the kids who studied in Hyderabad comes to Delhi -- you leave India from Palam Airport there -- and isn't quite ready to take the plane so she stays in my house, which seemed to be a way station for all kinds of wonderful young American children.

Ellie Klein goes to Connaught Circus. There she is, sipping a soda or coffee in a little cafe at the Circle, and at one of the tables is the foremost painter of India, Hussain. Ellie goes over to him and says, "May I say hello to you so I can tell my friends that I spoke to the greatest Indian artist in India?" He was so pleased with this he said, "Sit down, tell

me what is it you're interested in when you go home?" She said, "Well, I love to ride horses, it's something I miss here in India."

So the artist takes a pad out of his pocket and sketches a horse, a most magnificent horse, and he presents it to Ellie. She returns home with the horse, is delighted to share this experience with the family, and when she's about to leave she says to us, "The only thing I have of great value I want to leave with you -- the sketch of the horse." Well, I didn't want to take it but you can't reject an offer, so I took the horse, had it framed, and when I came back to America I mailed the sketch to Ellie Klein, now the proud possessor of her own gift from Hussain.

As a tangent, I was involved a little bit in another story about art and artists, the Tibetan thanka. Ruth Ruttenberg also did a junior year abroad, I think at a different time, and at the end of her stay she too was not ready to leave India and went to the North Hill Station where the Dalai Lama's sister was running a Tibetan orphanage. Ruth spent the summer there, helping and learning I guess. Before leaving India I did my final purchases at the American-run Godown, which is a shop for the sale of Tibetan and Indian ware helping to raise money for rehabilitation projects helping not only with Tibetans but Indians.

So here I am, armed with a Tibetan thanka, and, returning home, I realize that this most beautiful and valuable thanka should belong to Ruth Ruttenberg, the young woman who gave her summer to help Tibetan children. I left the thanka with Ruth's mother so that it would be a wedding present for Ruth. She's married now, has two children, and the thanka is in her home. She's still in communication with many of the Tibetans who were little orphans when she was in India. They're grown up now and are living all over the world.

Q: She must have been thrilled to receive it.

WEISZ: This is another example of my peripheral association with the wonderful things that American children were doing in India. Programs that seemed to be only educational in themselves for the student who goes junior year abroad have a far greater impact than just their influence on the student.

Anyway, let's move on, to a story about another young man who was travelling around the world and turns up as a dinner guest at my table. On his arrival this tall handsome young man's name means nothing to me, "Bill Bradley." I say to Bill Bradley, "What do you do for a living?" And he says, "Well, I play ball." "You play BALL?" "The world is coming to an end!" (she laughs heartily.) "We have so many problems, and you play ball? How could that be?" The young man was very embarrassed. My children and a couple of other guests around the table seem to be embarrassed too. I learned that this young man who was "playing ball" was a Rhodes scholar, had just been on the cover of Life or Time, one of the national magazines, and that I should have known that he was the foremost basketball player in the world. But I was so into the problems of India and the American relation with India that I couldn't equate the idea of somebody being a ballplayer with my own feelings.

Then I learned that this tall, handsome ballplayer was really travelling around the world because he had an aim in life, which was to get involved in the political arena and learn, before getting involved, learn about the world. Here again, my peripheral story touching an American life in just a small incident but having broader meaning, because this young man is now United States Senator Bradley, representing New Jersey.

Another incident, this one in Hyderabad... One of the hottest days of the hottest six years I spent in India, I found myself in the lobby of a hotel in Hyderabad. A young woman, also trying to escape the heat. Otherwise an empty lobby. I asked if I might sit with her, and when I learned that she was a German national, my first question to her was, "What do you think of the Holocaust?" I had just been reading so much about the problems of the world that were related to the Holocaust.

She said, "You know, you're a strange one. I've been travelling around since leaving Germany and nobody's ever asked me that." So I said, "Isn't it wonderful that now I ask it?" She didn't think it was so wonderful. She said, "Let me tell you: as a younger child in Germany when I had just graduated from school, the whole school had to go to visit a concentration camp. I was absolutely mortified. I was horrified by what I saw and what I was told. But then as I grew older I began to realize, what has it got to do with me? I wasn't born, I had nothing to do with the Holocaust. I was as horrified learning about it as I was horrified learning about the Inquisition. So I decided it had nothing to do with me and I pushed it away."

I said to her, "How could you push it away? You are a German, you live with people -- your uncles, your neighbors, the people in your village, your mayor -- everybody was involved before you were born and after you were born. They must have feelings about this." And she said, "It has nothing to do with me, nothing to do with me." She continued to want to push it away, and I realized I was trespassing on a highly emotional -- for both of us -- problem that would not be resolved in Hyderabad at that time.

Q: She didn't say anything about her parents or her uncles or…

WEISZ: No. She refused to talk about anything other than her own pushing aside.

Well, (laughing) that said, I believe I've come to the end of my rope.

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BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Morris (Morrie) Weisz

Spouse Entered Service: 1952 (Marshall Plan)	Left Service: 1971
You Entered Service: 1965 (India, U.S.)	Left Service: 1971

Status: Spouse of Retired Labor Attaché

Posts:

1952-57	Paris, France (USRO, Marshall Plan)
1965-71	New Delhi, India (Foreign Service)
1971	Washington, DC (Department of State)

Place and Date of Birth: New York, NY, 1916

Maiden Name: Yetta Faber

Schools:

Hunter College, NY
Wilson Teacher's College, Washington, DC

Date and Place of Marriage: New York, N.Y., 1935

Profession: Teacher

Children:

David
Ellen
Lucy

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:
A. At Post:
Paris, France, 1952-1957:

Brownie and Cub Scout Leader;

Hungarian Relief (1956-57)
New Delhi, India 1965-71:

President, American Women's Club (1966-67);
Co-chair, American Community Emergency Fund for Child Famine Relief (1966)

Volunteer Services:

Child Guidance School, Rajindra Paark, Shanker Road
Silver Jubilee TB Hospital, Old Delhi
All-India Institute of Medical Sciences Scool for handicapped children
Safdarjang Hospital, School for long-term hospitalized children
Ring Road School
Hostess, International Labor Conferences, 1966 and 1970, and Embassy Labor Day Celebration, 1968
India Chairperson, Americans Abroad for Humphrey-Muskie, 1968

B. In Washington, D.C., 1960-65

Social Science teacher, Sharpe Health (Secondary) School, for children with

neuro-musical disabilities
Member, D.C. History Department Curriculum Revision Committee
President, History Department-sponsored Round Table of the District of Columbia

End of Interview