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MARION POST WOLCOTT

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INTERVIEW

WOLCOTT: When they interviewed Lee, the real interview, we had to fill in an application or a history of our, not only our education, but our interests and our training in any other field and interest. Did you have to do that?

Q: No, I didn't. I didn't realize that AID had done that.

WOLCOTT: Well, I don't know whether it was just this particular man who did that but I doubt it, because he didn't do much of anything and his questions were absurd and so forth, and so was his background. He was a chicken farmer all of his life. And why they sent him to interview Lee who had been a college professor and so forth and so on, that I don't know but it was very amusing.

Q: Do you know what use was ever made of that information?

WOLCOTT: Yes. That's the point. They had this information so when I reached there, when I reached Tehran, there was considerable pressure put on me to teach in the American school because I had an education in teaching and I had taught in this country for a short while.

Q: Now did you want to teach in the school?

WOLCOTT: Not at first, but then I felt that they really needed everybody they could get. What little I saw of the school and realized what their plight was and that they needed people even if they didn't have the proper training. They were taking almost anyone. And they didn't have the equipment they needed either in the school.

Q: So what did you teach? What grades?

WOLCOTT: I taught fourth grade but...and then I taught remedial reading because I'd had a couple of courses in remedial reading in Albuquerque. We were living in Albuquerque and Lee was teaching at the University and so the children were old enough that I could take courses. So I did and I had that background so they not only enlisted me to...

[tape interruption...conversation]

WOLCOTT: But then of course they discovered also that I knew something about remedial reading and there are so many children who need that. So I never had a break during the day, as some teachers did. For instance when they had a French teacher come into the class, I could have had a break then but I went over and taught remedial reading to another class.

Q: And how old were the children at that time?

WOLCOTT: Our children?

Q: Yes.

WOLCOTT: Let's see. '59...Linda was...she must have been ten or eleven when this man came to interview us in Albuquerque. He took it for granted, and people did generally then - I think they weren't as health conscious and so forth - that generally when people came that late in the afternoon, they wanted a drink. And most State Department people

that we had anything to do with wanted a drink at a cocktail hour, so Linda and I had fixed hors d'oeuvres and had gotten out whisky and gin or whatever -- scotch -- had it in the kitchen and Linda was supposed to bring it in so she couldn't have been that small and that young. So one of the first things this gentlemen asked us -- me -- was did we drink? And he seemed to be very concerned about this. So I thought, well, now I know a little bit about the other women or the other wives, possibly [laughter]. It clued me in a little bit. So I excused myself and I took Linda out and I said, "Linda, get some tea." And fix some tea and some little tea sandwiches or something, and so she scrambled that together. And I said, "Put the liquor away."

Q: Interesting.

WOLCOTT: It was really interesting. But he had no background in anything that Lee or I had studied or had worked in whatsoever. And it was just amazing that they would send this type of man to interview a college professor or anyone. He had no education or practically none. He was with some agriculture project that AID was working. And his whole attitude...

It was so narrow and so...it was sort of discouraging and it made me wonder what we were really getting into and whether it was a wise decision to go. But AID had had someone, I guess, the original person had come to the university, I think, and they needed someone in public administration.

Q: Oh, so there had been a recruiter before this?

WOLCOTT: There had been a recruiter...then the chicken farmer. He wasn't so young either. He was...as I remember he was at least fifty. Seems to me he was. Maybe not. Maybe I've just always had it in for chicken farmers. [laughter]

Q: So with some misgivings you did go off.

WOLCOTT: And also I had been promised that I could do some photography and that they had a darkroom. And of course I was still interested in photography although I hadn't done much while the children were growing up. You were mentioning that I left my photography career to do this, but I hadn't. I had left my career to bring up the first two children. Lee's wife had died when the children were very young so I sort of adopted the two children and then we had two more of our own. So we became one big family because they were so young. But then it was war and Lee decided he wanted to farm, so we farmed for about ten years in Virginia. Well, he stayed in government for two years while I was out there...and further out in Virginia near Oakton.

Q: Oh, yes, of course, Oakton is the suburbs now.

WOLCOTT: When I married Lee he had a home in Oakton. Then we moved out to well right near Waterford, near that area, I don't know if you know Waterford. But our first

farm was near a little town called Lovettsville. So that was our first house. We moved two or three times in that area.

Q: So how did you get to Albuquerque?

WOLCOTT: After about ten years, Lee was hurt in an accident and so it wasn't really practical for him to farm anymore. And also he had done enough. He did a lot of experimental work in farming as well and the children were a little older and this old friend of his at the University in Albuquerque called and said, "We need someone to teach this year and maybe next year too...someone's taking leave or sabbatical...so will you come?" So Lee said, "Yes, I've always wanted...." Well we had been in the Southwest anyhow and we went to Colorado Springs and put the children in school there. And then we just took off and went to Albuquerque and we were there six years while Lee taught. So the recruiter came to the University and they needed someone in that field. So Lee said, "All right, I'll be interviewed anyhow." So that's how we came upon the chicken farmer.

Then when we got to Tehran they did have a darkroom which they were using and they had a couple of people who were taking some sort of publicity photographs. I wasn't necessarily thinking of doing that. I just wanted to continue in the documentary vein of photographing that area and the culture and so forth. But soon the...some Iranian...of course they had Iranians too working for the project. I think they called them their counterparts...and they...one of them, maybe two of them...mainly one of them had the use of the darkroom part of the time and he was...I guess too aggressive and he sort of abused his privileges. And he was using all the supplies and getting all this paper and film and everything. Somehow or other through AID. And so they just finally closed the darkroom facilities because it was being abused by the local people. So...

Q: And you were never asked to run it or take charge of it?

WOLCOTT: Well, I didn't really want to...not the darkroom, no. And I was involved in teaching at that time. So between teaching and the obligation of a certain amount of social obligations plus my children...

Q: Sounds like you had a plateful.

WOLCOTT: I had enough.

Q: One of the things that has come up with the AID wives who went out in the '50's and before is that they were not sent out for any specific purpose, but you seem to have had a very full life on many levels. Your own teaching level...

WOLCOTT: Well I think you had to do that though. I think you had to make that yourself...because there were many people...at least a good number of wives who did nothing really except play bridge and cocktail and party and were miserable, I thought.

But maybe they liked it. But that was another reason for getting into something else. If you didn't have something else to do you were almost...or didn't have any other interests (and many of them didn't)...if they had smaller children, they farmed them out to nannies and to people to take care of them who were so cheap. Any kind, as you know, many servants were available and very reasonable. And they had an allowance. So they just turned their children over to the nannies or the servants they had. That was another thing that bothered me and made me feel that teaching in the school was important because these American kids were, I felt, sort of dumped. And I didn't think the parents...of course there were many parents who did still have some involvement and cared about their own children. But many of them, I felt, were too...just they didn't get enough love and attention from their parents, I didn't think.

Q: Back that far? I mean that of course is one of the complaints today with the two career family and children coming home to empty houses.

WOLCOTT: I thought that too. The houses weren't empty but the children picked up the language pretty quickly and that was good for them. I mean that was one of the advantages of their being left alone with the servants because many of the servants didn't speak English. At least ours didn't. And most of the people I know didn't. In India it was different. I mean they had cook bearers or bearers and the cook. And they often spoke English if you could get the best ones.

Q: How did you communicate with your Iranian servants.

WOLCOTT: Well, that's another beef I had about the program. And it really annoyed me and made me mad because they wanted you to...or they wanted me at least...to teach which took a lot of time. I mean it wasn't just a part time job-teaching. And you had to do homework, too. I mean you had to correct the children's papers at home or you had to stay late at school. You had to make lesson plans. If you hadn't taught for a long while or you hadn't taught that grade, you had a lot of work to do. In the science area, fortunately, I had a parent of one of the boys who was a scientist and loved science and liked to participate and so we did all kinds of things in the science class that I wouldn't have been able to do alone. But I think he was grateful that his child had a teacher who was...I had been brought up and had been in the progressive school as a young person and in high school. So I was interested in that type of education. So this man was very helpful at building all kinds of things for us and the science classes.

But when we got to Tehran, the men immediately were given a very intensive, comprehensive language course. And they just took the time out and they were in school practically...the language school...for I think, six or eight weeks. And the women were just left to float around. If they didn't care about learning the language on their own or going to some, I suppose they had some schools where you could go. I didn't have time to do that. I didn't know anyone who had gone to a school to learn. Or they might have had a tape or something to learn the language. But I think it was AID's responsibility to give the women, the spouses, of course, at least a short course or some help in learning the

language. I have more facility with languages, a better ear I think than many women did, and I could pick up kitchen Farsi...which I did. Lee became very proficient in the language. And he gave his final farewell address in Farsi. But he had the help, not only of the language course which they gave him (the intensive course) but also he had an assistant. She was more than a secretary. And he had this assistant who insisted that he listen to her, that she speak Farsi to him as much as possible and that he answer her in reply to her and direct her in Farsi as much as possible. She became a very good friend actually. She had an interesting background. So we learned a lot of history from her, too. And we were interested in the history and the political angle of what was going on in Mossedegh and all of that. Her father had been very involved in the political scene. So it was a learning experience.

Q: You'll have to clue me in. My Iranian history is not very good. Was this during the temporary point when the Shah was out and Mossedegh was in? All right. So your husband...

WOLCOTT: Her father had been involved in that.

Q: So your husband must have had a very interesting time.

WOLCOTT: He did, he really did.

Q: And were you drawn into...did that draw you more into the Iranian scene, if you will, than some of the other AID wives who were there? I would think it would.

WOLCOTT: Yes, it did. We went to some of the social functions because Lee was connected with the Prime Minister and saw the relationship...well the cultural setup for women in that culture. And we saw that the women had this background of most often...the men seemed to have the English education, supplemental education. But most of the women seemed to have gone to France, many of them to Paris, some of them to England. But they all spoke French. And had I known that, for instance before, I would have boned up on French.

Q: No possibility of French lessons from AID.

WOLCOTT: No. And in Lee's position it would have been very useful. Linda, our daughter, went to AUB (American University of Beirut). Well the first year when we went to Iran she stayed...she was a freshman, an early admission freshman at the University of New Mexico. So she completed that year in New Mexico and then came and spent the summer with us in Iran. And John, who had been [at] Reed College for two years, he's a stepson, came and entered American University in Beirut also that year when Linda did. And Linda learned French...she'd had a little bit maybe one year or so in this country. But then when she went to AUB so many of the people spoke French that she immediately began to speak it, just pick it up. So she has a fine French accent, a good accent. And she loved the language and liked it. John mostly picked up chess. But

anyhow, John is very different from Linda. And John is ...they were close but they were in different...of course Linda was in the girl's dorm and John finally got a place in the Christian Center. And that was a peculiar circumstance because, of course, one thing they both learned was, and we learned too of course, what it was to experience being a minority. The American children were not welcome at American University. It was set up for Eastern students and for other foreign students. But not Americans. And so they were really in the minority--there weren't many of them at ABU and so they learned what it was like to not really be welcome someplace. And they had to really work a little bit to fit in. Of course Linda is quite lovely looking so she didn't have much of a problem -- and she was very young. She was only sixteen, I guess, at that time.

Oh, another thing when we had that first interview with the chicken farmer in Albuquerque. When Linda came in first (she was very pretty even then, even though she wasn't grown up very much) he took one look at her, and in front of her he said, "You're not taking her with you, are you? I wouldn't take her." And he went on, you know like anyone...

Q: Implying that she wouldn't be safe?

WOLCOTT: That she wouldn't be safe. And of course she realized what he was saying. He didn't say it in any way to us that would protect her from this at all. So, but he was also implying something about the...how he felt about the culture and the Iranians and the people generally. Which was so biased.

Q: Had he been there?

WOLCOTT: He'd been there. And worked there. But we saw both the people who were associated with the Prime Minister as well as the other people in Iran. And of course, I couldn't go on as many trips because I had this job. John graduated from American University. Linda was also made aware of the difference between the American adolescent's life and the Middle Eastern girl's experience, because she was not.... John had a great deal more freedom than she did. Linda was, I think they had 8 o'clock curfew...of course it was coed. But they had an 8 o'clock curfew. She had a couple of passes if her grades were good enough and her behavior was good enough. And they could get a late pass on the weekend maybe once a month or twice a month. But during vacations, when we had thought she would be able to take...and she had thought...that she'd be able to take little trips to fit in with the history she was studying (Middle Eastern history) with chaperons, and chaperons were available...they wouldn't allow her to because she was...it was not...the other students, other young women were not allowed to leave, they weren't allowed to go, their parents wouldn't allow them to go -- and so they wouldn't make an exception for her. We even wrote, which I suppose we shouldn't have done, to ask them to make an exception and let her go with a friend and with a group and with a chaperon...with a group and a couple of chaperons. And they wouldn't allow that either. So this made not only us aware...more aware...of the situation and the cultural differences, but also made the children extremely aware of it. It made Linda angry but she

got over that as soon as she roomed with an Iranian student and a girl who was...she kept in touch with her for a little while. And John roomed with a Sudanese, very black. They had been brought up in this country, of course, to associate with and respect Blacks and people of other cultures but they hadn't actually experienced living with them. And so that was good. But generally, I think, a lot of the women just made no effort to study anything or to read anything very much. And so I became grateful that I had the job of teaching. it was taxing in many respects. It limited me. There were not substitutes really available to you if you wanted to go on a trip. And you couldn't...

Q: You couldn't get sick, obviously.[laughs]

WOLCOTT: And the kids knew that nothing could happen to them. So discipline was difficult. The children knew that they couldn't be expelled. They knew that they really probably couldn't be kept home. They had had it imprinted on them, I'm sure, that they couldn't...that they shouldn't disgrace their father in another country. That was, I'm sure, general feeling among them. They did become difficult sometimes. And I think it was difficult for them...the AID children and teenagers had...didn't have...seems to me...I don't remember whether it was in every country or not...but they did not have the same privileges that the Ford Foundation and some of the contract children had. They couldn't have motor bikes, or they couldn't have.... There were certain other restrictions. I can't remember what they were, but I remember that they were always envious of what the Ford Foundation children could do and some of the other contract engineers, non-government people could do. And that was difficult. I think they couldn't go off the premises at certain times. I can't remember. I remember that they couldn't drive a car. They couldn't get a license, whereas if they had been in this country they could have. And that disturbed them. And they couldn't have a bike or a motorbike. I mean I guess they could have had an ordinary bicycle but not a motorbike of any kind.

Q: Were people scattered throughout Tehran or did they live in one neighborhood or compound living?

WOLCOTT: They lived most of them in the...what was it called...it was the northern part of the city up toward the hills where it was cooler. Oh how could I forget it? Anyhow, they lived there...most of them lived there. We lived a little further downtown. And we didn't have a huge house. Many people did, of course. And many of them had more servants. We had a very small swimming pool which we shared with -- we had just an apartment and the people on the other -- there were two apartments together. And actually the landlord was a Bahai which was interesting, too. Another religion another offshoot. And so the children, I think, saw many more...Linda said that they came from all over the world to American University. So they didn't see just the Iranian culture.

Q: What about your relationship with the Iranian women who could speak English?

WOLCOTT: Well there weren't very many who could. But there were some. And some of them were friends of some of the people who were with SRI, Stanford Research Institute.

I found...we found some of the SRI people very interesting. Lee had some connection with them and worked together a little bit with some of them. And their wives, I found, were much more interesting and often had better educations or used their educations...used their faculties, their skills. They weren't even interested in the crafts and the arts, many of them, which I couldn't believe.

Q: I can't believe that. That was my passion.

WOLCOTT: I know. Mine too. A few did and a few in AID did. There was one woman in particular and she and I used to scout around when we had time. But the ceramics, the old ceramics in Iran, that was one of my passions too. And of course the carpets. But just to watch them too. To watch them in the crafts. But I don't know. They just drank their way through and bridged their way through the two years or the four years because they had servants. And many of them hadn't had that before. But I think that they could have been stimulated, and interested if AID had provided a little more support for them. But they could have done something on their own too. They may have been...I don't know what they had done in this country or what their background had been but many of them may have been, quote just housewives that had been playing bridge and doing that kind of thing in this country to a certain extent. I have nothing against that just because I have not been interested myself, but it seems to me that that was their background perhaps here too.

Q: Did you notice that situation more in Tehran, or what about in Lahore and Cairo and New Delhi, was it the same?

WOLCOTT: Well in Lahore...you see my mother had always been involved in birth control. [Mrs Wolcott's mother had helped Margaret Sanger establish birth control clinics in New York.] And so I had continued that interest too. And so in Lahore there was a group there of women who were involved in birth control. And I decided that I would look into it a little bit.

Q: Pakistani women or American women?

WOLCOTT: Pakistani. And they were the wives of some of the men who Lee worked with in his job in Lahore. I had Michael our youngest son with us still in Lahore, too. And he didn't have a good experience with the American school in Tehran. And the high school was really very bad in Tehran and all of the posts, I thought. But the women in Lahore for some reason which I could never figure out, did not welcome any...well they seemed to feel that it was sort of interference...or that it was...maybe they felt that I was trying to check up on what they were doing. But they did not welcome my interest in the birth control movement there.

Q: I think that's not unusual, do you?

WOLCOTT: No. I didn't understand it completely at the time. But I gradually did. But

they were also...they were proud and they were not too outgoing. The Iranian women we met through the SRI people, who did speak English, were much friendlier and much more interested in the Americans I thought and they...some of them came to this country, of course, later on, and were and still are good friends of these friends of ours in Palo Alto. I wondered who you interviewed in Palo Alto.

Q: No one in Palo Alto. I was staying there because my son lives there. And we stay with a former Stanford psychology professor, Douglas Lawrence and his wife Mary whose brother lived here in Santa Barbara until he died several years ago.

WOLCOTT: This SRI friend who was with us...this friend of ours who was with SRI in Tehran is still one of our best friends. We see each other very frequently. Well, not very frequently...we keep in touch and write and phone. They have continued all of their contacts with foreign students and they take foreign students into their home. And they still see the people who were the Iranian women who spoke English. Some of the men too. And so we see them at their house occasionally. And hear about what's going on because they get information through the grapevine. Even those who are living in this country. But it's been a continuing interest and of course it has stimulated our interest in that whole situation ever since, and our children's [interest]. But I think for instance we went to Cairo after Pakistan. In Pakistan I substituted more than I...I didn't take a regular full time teacher's job. And by that time I was also suffering from amoebic dysentery which dogged me the whole time, almost the whole time I was overseas.

Q: Oh dear. Miserable.

WOLCOTT: And I had the worst strain or whatever of it. And so I had an awful time getting rid of it. And in Lahore I was sick a good deal of the time. Also in Lahore I was interested in crafts and the arts and became a little involved in that. But I was also trying to work with Michael our younger son a little bit. And he wasn't doing too well in school and that was disturbing because he was envious of the other children and what they could do. We had a beautiful garden in Lahore which was a pleasure. And a very strange gardener who was weird and very resentful of me as a woman because the AID person who had had our house...which was a lovely house and beautiful furniture in it which we sort of inherited...furniture had all been handmade for the previous owner...and also the fabrics and things like that and the hand blocking of the fabrics was fascinating. Michael tended to associate with some of the Pakistani boys which was good and bad, and so we had to watch that a little bit because they were older than he was. And leading him down some of the paths that we felt were not exactly where we wanted him to go and we didn't always know where he was going. So we had to take care of that. He didn't get into any trouble but one felt that he might. The gardener became very difficult. He was considered the best gardener in all of Lahore. He had the most beautiful garden -- flowers, mango trees and so forth. But he'd had a room of his own in one end...one separate area of this house. And with our children and so forth, we asked him to move back into the...we were wise...it was suggested that we get him to move into the servants quarters which were perfectly adequate in the back. So he resented that and thought that I was behind that

move.

Q: It was a demotion, I suppose in his eyes.

WOLCOTT: It was a demotion because then he had to go into another section, a better section actually, than where the male sort of helper, cooks helper lived. I felt that one thing I could do which ...

(End Tape 1, Side A; Begin Side B)

WOLCOTT: Well there were ...the young man who was the kitchen helper was just above the sweeper, I mean his wife was the sweeper -- a charming lovely looking woman and beautiful -- even the sweepers had the colorful clothing. They weren't saris, they weren't the beautiful silk saris, but even if they were just cotton rags around them, they were beautiful colors.

Q: Was the sweeper the lowest echelon?

WOLCOTT: The sweeper was, pretty much. But his wife lived also in the back somewhere and she became pregnant and we felt that she should go to get some prenatal care at the clinic there. And she wouldn't. But we worried about her. It was her first child. And we felt that maybe she could. But also I thought...I was never able to persuade her to go to a clinic or to go anywhere. And so even with the help of other people we couldn't persuade her. And she did have a breech birth and lost the baby. But even then when it was realized that she was having a breech birth or that she was having great difficulty, we tried to get her to go to the hospital, to transport her to the hospital, but she wouldn't. And she lost the baby. But it was a cultural thing. It was not the thing to do. And they were afraid of it too. But the parents just had sort of a wake right there. But her husband, this young man, I felt had the ability to become what they called sort of a cook bearer. But he wasn't a high class...he couldn't have become a high class cook bearer because he would have been beaten up by the other cook bearers. They didn't want anybody to get into their business. And they would have really given him a hard time. But there were some bachelors who didn't have any spouses with them. And they had sort of created the need for a young man to come in who would fix breakfast for them, shop for them, do very simple cooking for them or make sandwiches and fix breakfast for them. So I thought that I could teach this young man a little English, which I did, and teach him better marketing -- he did help with the marketing before -- but I thought I could teach him a little more about marketing and selecting vegetables and meat and so forth. And I found that the cooks didn't really want to teach them. They didn't want them to get into their department. And so they kept them under their thumb. And so I taught them what I could and taught them some English...taught him some English. I tried to impress on him the importance of the routine that we went through to wash our vegetables and our fruits in the iodine or chlorine or whatever we used in rinsing them -- which we did with all of them. And which the cooks or cook bearer would skip over if you didn't keep really close watch on them. With my experience with amoebic dysentery, I didn't want the children or anybody

else or my husband to get it. So I watched perhaps more carefully than some did. But I wanted him to realize the importance of it. And I think I was either reinfected or..I think probably I was infected first in Tehran but then later again in Lahore because we had a cook bearer who -- of course they had to bring you papers saying that they had been tested and all of that -- but they bought these from other cooks and from other servants. So they were not valid.

So you had to check on those too. And we checked and found that the one man who had been most closely involved with our family had done that. He did have maybe dysentery. But it was very painful to me to see that and to see how difficult it was when they once got a record of having amoebic dysentery it was so difficult for them to be hired again. And that's all they could do. And they wanted to share in this bonanza. But you became fond of them and you didn't know what to do and so. But, of course, some of them were very able people and you felt sorry for their families too. But I did help this young man to get work and get jobs with some of these bachelors who would come in. I prepared him to do that kind of thing. So that was one thing I felt good about. And I think the children saw what it was like to be a servant in those countries. And then they saw some of the clinics. In Pakistan, I took a photograph there of one of the clinics which was a clinic that was sponsored by a commercial...I can't remember what it was now. I should have thought of that. It just occurred to me now. But the children saw the disease and the way the people lived. And they saw the caste system in India and in Pakistan. And they learned the history of that. And the Hindu and the difference between the culture in Pakistan and in India.

Q: Did you do a lot of photography?

WOLCOTT: I did do a little that was actually destroyed. Partly by me or mostly by me, partly destroyed by the people who developed them in the local places. I tried to have my black and white photographs developed by different local people, but they really wrecked a lot of them. But then I finally just went to color mostly and sent it back APO to this country. But then when we went to Egypt I thought well, I'm going to take back a lot of my slides and a lot of my things with me to try to really edit them, to try to put them in good shape and organize them. So I took a lot of things and sent a lot of things to Egypt. And then we were evacuated -- the '67 war. So I knew that...well I had to go. I didn't want to, but they insisted that the women go -- leave [before the men]. We were told that everything would probably be taken from us, that we could only take out some clothing and things like that. Probably our cameras and film and everything of that type would be taken. So the night before we left, it was...or the night before I left...I should precede that by the sort of trauma that went before the actual evacuation. Because we knew what was going on and the hostility was building up toward the Americans before the war. For instance, if I walked...we had an apartment right on the Nile and if I walked, at that time, from our apartment building to the Embassy...which we were told to go to and not to wander all over the city and not to go and do any shopping or anything in that time. We were supposed to stay at home as much as possible during those days and just go the Embassy if we needed anything or if there was any problem of any kind. When I would

walk to the Embassy I would be spat upon into my face and on my clothes at times. Not often. And I would hurry. But then finally when it was decided that we would be evacuated, I gave many things that were local -- beautiful saris that I'd gotten in Dhaka, the finest...what did they call them, the ones that were just like cobwebs, that I'd gotten for my children and then other things -- I gave them to this cook bearer who had been so.... In Cairo, he was wonderful. He'd been trained by Ford Foundation again.

Everybody wanted him and we ended up with him because of someone we knew in Ford Foundation...quite friendly. And so the night before, Lee and I were sitting there packing and going through what should we take out and I was loaded up like a donkey with all kinds of income tax things and all kinds of crazy things. And there wasn't much room to take much else. But I felt that I didn't want to leave any photographs or slides -- a lot of mine were slides at that time -- for the Egyptian government. I had taken quite a few photographs of the family planning program in Pakistan and in India. That was later in India after we were evacuated from Cairo and we went to India. In Pakistan, they had allowed me to take some photographs. They were mostly slides. But I had given many of those to the Pakistani Family Planning Program to use, which they did in their teaching. So those just stayed there. I didn't bring them back or have them printed. And then the rest -- the night before we left, we just sat on the couch and I just tore up and cut up and burned all kinds of negatives and mostly slides. And I did the same thing that I had taken in the other countries. Because I had them there -- which was too bad I took them there at that time. And actually they did take, when I finally got to the evacuation, they did take just about everything that they could possibly take that would be something that they might not want to be shown or that they didn't know whether it could be possibly something that they... or maybe they were just curious. They were just grabbing things at the airport.

Q: Now were these the Egyptian officials?

WOLCOTT: Yes. At the airport.

Q: They were checking you out in evacuation?

WOLCOTT: Yes, as well as the Americans. But the Americans couldn't do much. And there were Egyptians checking us out finally, too. But then when Lee was checked out...when he was finally evacuated, they were taking all kinds of things out of their baggage too. Of course they came out by ship. We went out by plane. But people...the women who were sitting around in that airport were just kind of numb, a lot of them. I think I was too numb and too sad and too worried to really care about taking photographs. I did, of course I didn't have the camera with me then anyhow, after I got into the area where everyone was waiting. We didn't have much time to wait that I recall. It had been such a traumatic night and I was so worried about Lee and about being separated and not knowing really what was going to happen to him, because it was very -- I felt and believed and most of us did -- that it was a very dangerous situation. And we really didn't know whether we would see each other again.

And we were still in love and still cared about each other, so it was painful. And then we were evacuated to Athens and some of the women went to the Hilton. They had a better allowance...I mean the Ford Foundation people had a better allowance, so they could spend more money and probably they put their own money into it too. Some of them went to the Hilton and I stayed in one of the downtown smaller hotels. Partly because some of the other women who had small children with them, I felt took advantage or tried to take advantage of the women who didn't have children. They had been sort of spoiled. I thought. They had had nannies for the children all along, the whole time that they were at their post. They had almost forgotten how to cope. And they didn't really like it. And they felt that the women who were without children would...should help them in their trauma take care of their children, and take turns with them, so that they could have time off, more time off. They were envious of those of us who didn't...

Q: I find that very presumptive.

WOLCOTT: And I did too. I sort of said, and wasn't particularly liked because I did, I said no I'm not going to go off... Another reason I went to this other hotel, so that I wouldn't be involved and make it more difficult for me to refuse to do this. Then several of the women who had been drinking too much were perhaps on the verge of being alcoholics. I sound like a real...like I'm really emphasizing the alcohol.

Q: But it was there.

WOLCOTT: But it was there. But when this happened to them and they were separated from their husbands at this time, they became really alcoholics. They just drank all the time. And so I didn't even like to be with them or have dinner with them or eat with them and associate with them very much when we were in Athens. The only way you could find out about your husband's whereabouts or welfare, whether they were going to make that ship, whether a ship was going to reach them to take them to Athens, what their situation was, was through the embassy. So you had to go to the Embassy every day or as often as you wished. You could stay there as often as you wished. They would give you the latest reports which they got. They didn't call you up at the hotel where you were. You had to go to the Embassy, which was all right. they really did their best. They arranged trips for you. But they did that mostly when the men finally did arrive. And you were in limbo where you didn't know whether you were going to accept another post which was offered to you or whether you could go back. I mean the men could just go back to the States and then see what they wanted to do. And see what other jobs and what other countries or...

Q: What an administrative nightmare that must be.

WOLCOTT: So that choice you had. The women also had a choice of going home if they wanted to. You were given the choice of going immediately home and your carfare, of course, would be paid. Or whether you wanted to stay in Athens and wait for your

husband. Of course I wanted to stay. I was interested in Athens and all the things there were in Athens, but you didn't do as much because you always wondered what you were going to learn. So you tended to stay at the Embassy just to find out when the next...especially if they hadn't any information. But you did do some things, mostly you ate too much too. But I think it was also a learning experience to go through that. I had a feeling sometimes that some of the women were just glad to be free of their husbands and be free of their responsibility or the nightmare that they seemed to have felt that it had been for them. These were the women mostly without children and without any interest in the culture or the arts and crafts.

Q: Would that also be a liberation from the Embassy/AID hierarchy that existed? Could it have been partly a release from that?

WOLCOTT: It could have been. The strain of trying to fit in. Of course, in Pakistan, they spoke English. It wasn't the language problem that there was in Iran. And they spoke English. And in India, of course, they all spoke English. So they could have fit in with the women, the other women if they had wanted to. I often wondered how much resentment there was in some of the women of having to go and their husbands taking this interesting job, and their having to go along with him.

Q: Being uprooted from their home here, their family, their children's lives.

WOLCOTT: There were a couple of women with the United Nations that were interesting. One in particular...I've forgotten...just suddenly occurred to me...she was very interesting. But then their job was different from ours.

Q: Did she actually have an assigned task to do as a spouse?

WOLCOTT: No. I think she just made it herself. I think so. I can't remember what she did have.

Q: When you look back as far as 1959, that was before the Women's Movement and I don't remember any role for me at all, except the school and the charity and...

WOLCOTT: Well, I think it had something to do with feeding and health that she was involved in with her husband. But whether she made that or whether she actually was paid as a teacher... I'm not sure. She had children. They were not with her. They were teenagers and they were in this country's schools and she used to go back and forth a lot. I remember being envious of her going back and forth and seeing her children. Then our children...our daughter, our younger daughter married when we were in...where were we...I can't remember where we....

Q: You remember when she was married?

WOLCOTT: Yes. Let's see. She was in Berkeley. And she, I remember that they sent us a

tape. She was very apologetic because he was a Republican. She'd met him in the International Club. They both were in the International Club. And he was a Republican. His father was a doctor. And they met. She was in Berkeley. Her best friend actually...she was going to go to an Eastern college but her best friend at AUB was enrolled at Berkeley for her final....They both wanted to graduate from an American College. And Linda had decided that she wanted to go to an Eastern college -- to Vassar. And she had been accepted by Vassar and some other college...not Swarthmore. And then this girl said, "No come on, you want to go to California, you want to go to Berkeley, and I'm going to Berkeley and we'll get you into Berkeley too." So she ended up in Berkeley. But she...her best friend, although she associated with all the foreign students in AUB, her best friends were American. The three best friends were American. So she...these are still friends of hers. She still sees them, especially the one in Berkeley now whose husband (I've forgotten what her husband does) but she has been working with the library in Berkeley for many years. Their children didn't become friends but they have continued a mild friendship. Where was I before that?

Q: Well in Athens, with the evacuation. I still have you in Athens. I'm wondering when you left, how you left, where you finally met with Lee again.

WOLCOTT: Well we finally. Lee was offered a post in Seoul. So he said, "Pack up, we're going to Seoul. " So I packed everything. So then...I can't remember..I should ask him if you really needed to know why he decided not to go to Seoul. But it had something to do with learning something more about what he would have to do or who he was going to work under -- something to do with the job. Se he came in and said, "Forget it we're not going to Seoul." And I said,"So, what now. Where else.?"

Q: Were you in Athens at this point?

WOLCOTT: Yes. We were still in Athens. And when the men joined us they did arrange tours for us -- local tours in Athens -- AID did this and the Embassy. And I do give them credit for that. They arranged bus tours to different places...to Delhi and various places in Athens. Then the next post he was offered was India. And I said, "Well I don't know whether I really want to go with you to India or not." That was the first time in our marriage, I think, that I had said what I had wanted to do.

Q: That would have been your fourth Middle East post, well Middle East or subcontinent post.

WOLCOTT: He said, "Why not?" And I said, "Because I'm mad at Indira because she immediately took up against Israel in the Five Day War, the Six Day War. It really was a five day war or a four day war. So we keep calling it a Five Day War although it's always referred to as the Six Day War. So I said, "She came out much too fast and much too soon for the Egyptians. Took their side. I'm not so sure that I want to go and assist." But it turned out he was head of the population control project there. So I couldn't resist that because of my long term in family planning. So my mother was with one of Margaret

Sanger's early first clinic in New York City...the first clinic. So she worked for her for many years after her divorce. Mother divorced early, before women did that, and went with Margaret Sanger and established birth control clinics all over this country. So I had long been associated with that. So when they offered Lee this job, I said, "All right I'll go but I'm still mad at Indira Gandhi." But I was glad I went, of course.

But we were only in Cairo for a very short time really. Lee had gone ahead and he had spent the summer, part of the summer in Cairo while I stayed home in the States. So he had more of Egypt than I did. And then I went later on. But we were there for a short time and I still had hangovers of amoebic dysentery. It had gotten much worse too in India. So I was sick a lot of the time and I couldn't do as much.

Q: That colors your...

WOLCOTT: It really does.

Q: ...feelings about a post, if anything will. Did you feel that the evacuation from Cairo...did you have a lot of advance notification from the Embassy and was it well planned or was it hit-or-miss haphazard?

WOLCOTT: I think it was well planned, yes. Lee was evacuated at night so that they wouldn't know that they were being evacuated. So the local officials wouldn't know that he was evacuated to the Palestine Hotel in Alexandria -- I think that was the name of it anyhow. He'll have to tell you that story if you wanted to hear it. I think they thought it was well planned. And I thought the evacuation of the women was quite well planned -- as well as it could be. I don't know how much the Embassy knew. It's hard to judge. In fact it's almost impossible to judge because you don't know. They must have had a lot of information certainly that we didn't have. But they protected us as much as possible. Lee lost practically his whole library, his good library, the best of his library. I lost a lot of...some of my library and what few things that I cared about, a lot of them I lost. That wasn't too serious. You expect that and I think that they finally did ship our car, which was almost brand new, in a box to...I've forgotten where it went. I remember a funny incident...there are a couple of incidents...two in Cairo that were interesting. This was sort of the same type of thing. You couldn't go and get your car unless you appeared personally to pick it up, to identify it and pick it up when it was taken out of its lift van. So they opened the box. I went with Lee...I've forgotten where that was...so it was all banged up. It was almost new because we hadn't been there very long. And it was a wreck. They had torn everything out of the inside of it -- the lights, and just pulled them all out, and pulled out the radio and all the electrical parts, and the front was all bashed in and the paint was a mess, vandalized. And so they said, "Never mind. Come back tomorrow or a couple of days and we'll have it all fixed." And so he went back and they showed him, they said it's not quite finished, Sahib, and so we'll have it finished for you and so he said, "Maybe it's all right. Maybe I can take it with me." And they said, "No, no." And so they showed it to him. They had painted the whole car -- the windows, the lights, the chrome, the tires [laughter]. They had spray painted the whole car.

Q: Oh no.

WOLCOTT: Yes. And so he said, well you know, what am I going to do. They sprayed the windshield. They said never mind, never mind. Two hours we'll have it ready for you. So they got about six or eight people together and with little tiny scrapers, like razor blade scrapers, and they all got on this car and scraped it and then took some kind of remover, paint remover or whatever, and washed it and scrubbed it and got it back in shape. And he went away with this car. [laughter]

Q: What an experience!

WOLCOTT: And to think what that was doing to their lungs, too, when I think of it. But they also spray painted...that was in Cairo...they redid the whole apartment. And they practically did the same thing to this gorgeous wood floor which had a beautiful patina on it. They scraped it all. And when they painted, they got the whole floor just covered with paint. But the way they put the paint on. After each occupancy they insisted on painting the whole apartment and doing everything over. And you got new drapes and all that. So they said well you have to select exactly the color you want and we'll mix it for you. So I said, "All right. I'll be there at such and such a time." So the painter said, "What color do you want?" and showed me the samples. And I said, "This one." So then he mixed some more and then I expected him to take a brush and put it up. And he took the pail that he mixed it in, took a big swish of it in his mouth, and then went "Whoosh" all over the walls. And he did that about three or four times [laughter] and I just couldn't stand it any longer. I said, "That's all right. That color is fine."

Q: This is in New Delhi?

WOLCOTT: [laughter] No, that wasn't in New Delhi. That was in Cairo.

Q: In Cairo. All right. Before the evacuation. All right. Yes. [laughs]

WOLCOTT: So they fixed over this apartment. This was in Cairo. And then when I saw the man...we had a man who did the laundry too and ironed. And he came. He was separate. the cook bearer didn't do any of that, of course. And he came and he did the same thing with spraying the laundry. He had to starch some things. Although I told him not to. He had to lightly starch them. But then I said no. He took water in his mouth and that was the way he sprinkled the clothes. The same way. [whoosh sound]

Q: How extraordinary.

WOLCOTT: But this kind of thing you can't believe.

Q: Now tell me, were you able to get involved in family planning in any way in New Delhi?

WOLCOTT: Excuse me one second...[Tape interruption, they examine photographs]

WOLCOTT: I can't remember the name of it now.

Q: And this is in Lahore. Now you said the women had never seen a clinic like this before. Did you mean our American women?

WOLCOTT: Yes. But they had never seen people sitting out. We had clinics in this country but they weren't in that shape and they weren't just sitting in the open air and things like that. This was in Iran, but not in Tehran. This was on a short trip that I took. It was Ramadan, I think. But that was to show the jube where they had water running down the jube for a certain number of hours or at certain times of day...where they washed the children and then they used this for laundry and they used this for anything.

Q: Oh just this little part right here is the jube.

WOLCOTT: Yes. That's the jube

Q: And look the person washing up here. It just streams on down there.

WOLCOTT: And of course it was filthy. And they used it as a toilet some of the time. It came from up in the mountains.

Q: Pure when it started. So it was running all the time, or did they turn it off? They controlled it? And then this is just a street. It's right along the edge of it.

WOLCOTT: Yes. It was a main street in that city. I was trying to find them. Most of them are in slides...what I have. Or else they are stowed away somewhere. This was just in Egypt...just to show the way they got their fuel there.

Q: Now would that be fuel for lamps?

WOLCOTT: Lamps, mostly. Yes.

Q: Your composition and contrast are splendid

WOLCOTT: This was in...oh this was the same...Pakistan...India...let's see. Well, I was following along with a nurse in the family planning program. They did let me do a little bit of that. I went out a couple of days.

Q: Now we're in New Delhi now?

WOLCOTT: No. I think we're in Pakistan now. But this is....She had a little drawing of the husband, and this was the wife.

Q: Now who had done those?

WOLCOTT: [to husband] Now where were you evacuated to first?

Mr. WOLCOTT: Oh, to Alexandria, to the Hotel Palestine [laughs], interestingly enough. It was on an estate which had been owned by the King Farouk...a big area.

WOLCOTT: At night you were evacuated.

Mr. WOLCOTT: Yes, all lights out. It was miserable.

Q: Now she had done this?

WOLCOTT: Well somebody had done it for her, I guess. But she was the nurse and she was teaching the local women in this village about family planning. I have some other colored pictures stowed away in the garage, I think. We've been trying to reorganize things and we haven't done very well. But everything is in completely different area. And here are some of the women. She's going to some of their homes. And some of the women are following her and going where somebody else lives. I suppose it was just the textures of everything and their clothing.

Q: This one especially.

WOLCOTT: And then I took some inside the clinics. But, as I say, most of them disappeared.

Q: And these are beautiful. Now your interest in family planning. Did you live with your mother while she was working for Margaret Sanger?

WOLCOTT: Part of the time. I was in school part of the time -- boarding school. And then when I came home from boarding school, I would spend part of the time with my father and part of the time with her.

Q: But that was an early influence in that area.

WOLCOTT: Oh yes. It definitely was. Yes. And it's a continued interest. The Indian women, when I was in India and trying too get involved a little bit in the family planning clinics...if I went alone just to see what was going on and what the setup was and to see whether I thought it was photogenic or whether there was anything going on that I could photograph -- they weren't open all day and every day or anything like that -- they seemed to feel that perhaps because they knew that I was connected with the government or with AID or they didn't know who I was. They were afraid that I was checking out to find out what was wrong. They knew that they weren't really up to the standards that they were supposed to meet. And they were suspicious of what I was doing or why I was there. So I

think that was inhibiting. I couldn't really take the photographs. They would just simply close up. Or someone from where we were staying would report to them, saying so and so checked in or so and so with his wife is visiting.

(End of Tape 1, Side B)

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Mr. Leon O. Wolcott joins conversation

WOLCOTT: Were they all local? As you can see I hadn't thought about it for so long, very much.

Mr. WOLCOTT: Come again?

WOLCOTT: Weren't all those clinics, the family planning clinics in India, weren't they all local? Wasn't that a family planning conference in Trivandrum? And where else? Part of that other trip was just travel, Lucknow, I didn't go with you to Lucknow. I was teaching, or substituting or something. They had a big family planning conference up in the hills somewhere. Where was that? That I did attend and that was fascinating.

Mr. WOLCOTT: I don't remember which hill station it was

WOLCOTT: Because the little carts that you rode in had family planning signs all over them and I remember the children who were coming out of the school passed a wall, and on the wall were these family planning paintings and posters. And I remember one photograph I took with that in the background. The stream of kids coming by.

Mr. WOLCOTT: And the slogan. One, Two Children, Stop.

WOLCOTT: Yes, I have pictures of that.

Mr. WOLCOTT: One, Two Children, Stop.

Q: Other than the education did you take any...well, they were doing vasectomies in India for awhile. Was that in your day too? Were they accepting that?

Mr. WOLCOTT: Well, they were mostly marginal cases. You know, males who were almost beyond the period of reproduction.

Q: Had already had ten or twelve children?

Mr. WOLCOTT: Already had a mob.

WOLCOTT: The younger ones weren't too anxious to.

Q: I would think not.

WOLCOTT: No, they wanted ...

Q: One's malehood in the Third World where you have not much else.

WOLCOTT: They wanted the security.

Mr. WOLCOTT: That's their Social Security program. They have to have a male child to take care of them in their old age. So in order to have one male child you have to have at least four children. Because infant mortality is high.

WOLCOTT: Well, they tried the pill with the women and they found that didn't work at all. They hemorrhaged, and no that was the loupe, the IUD. That was really a disaster, practically, because if a women is menstruating or bleeding in any way they are completely ostracized.

Mr. WOLCOTT: She is unclean, she is out, she can't even go into her own kitchen.

WOLCOTT: So that was a disaster because that brought on hemorrhaging at all times, and never predictable. So that didn't work, so that's when they really went more into the vasectomies.

Q: Why didn't the pill work?

WOLCOTT: They were afraid of it, I think.

Mr. WOLCOTT: No, there was a lot of evidence coming from Britain at that time, stroke and heart trouble as a result of the pill.

WOLCOTT: Long term side effects were coming from Britain. So the government was afraid of it.

Q: And was there any reluctance on the part of the women not to have children? Or were they like most Third World women who would just as soon not?

Mr. WOLCOTT: Well, that seemed to be the case.

WOLCOTT: That seemed to be, nobody ever really knew. Or whether they ever dared say. Where is that stack of photographs which were in that museum show of mine this year? The ones that were not Farm Security Administration photographs were in a separate pile. Do you know where they went. I looked for them and they are no longer on the bench. There were a few that I took of the family planning program in that. They were color.

Q: Do you still have the one of the children marching by the slogan?

WOLCOTT: No, it's in a slide somewhere, but I don't know where. But the women who attended that conference were women who spoke English, of course, and who were absolutely beautifully dressed. I can remember their saris, and they were very handsome women. Tall, beautiful women in these saris, very intelligent and very bright, and their participation in the conference was respected by the men and they had it made and they were very impressive, I remember, thinking Thank God there is some status (for women). But they were a little haughty, a little I think they were polite, beautifully mannered, but I don't think they really accepted the American women there. The image of the American women had already been somehow (cast).

But I don't remember what happened. I took a few photographs then, and I didn't have fast enough film, fast enough lens really at that time, but I could have done better now. But I did get a few photographs.

Q: Where did your interest in photography, and your obvious skill in photography, originate?

WOLCOTT: Oh, he's found a box. Let's see. I think these are the children's pictures. They are color and larger. A lot of these are FSA.

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WOLCOTT: (Referring to Chester Bowles) And he was very nice, too, but he was ill then, too. But she was particularly interested in the women and trying to get them to be more active. But also with some of the women, she had a real personal relationship with them. She, I think, cared about them, some of the American women who had been there longer, and about how they were adjusting, but she was also a person without any pretensions and a really genuine person who was interested in the people and the culture. Can you remember much about her or about him?

Mr. WOLCOTT: Well, I remember quite a bit about him from all the staff meetings.

WOLCOTT: But did she appear - did you remember her association with any of the women? Anything that you saw that I didn't see?

Mr. WOLCOTT: Well, at the receptions ...

WOLCOTT: At the receptions she was also very ...

Mr. WOLCOTT: Well, one of the big things that they did jointly, I think, was to establish a policy in India whereby wives were encouraged to travel with their husbands on business.

WOLCOTT: Yes, she did.

Mr. WOLCOTT: At government expense.

Q: That was unusual back at that time, wasn't it?

WOLCOTT: Yes, but she really did do that.

Mr. WOLCOTT: Of course the United States had several billion rupees (laughs).

Q: Oh, blocked. But what a worthwhile use of that blocked currency.

Mr. WOLCOTT: I think that was her doing. Of course Chester being the ambassador put it into effect, but it sounds like her.

WOLCOTT: I always thought that it was her doing. I had forgotten about that, but she did. I think that's how I went on that Trivandrum trip and also that other trip to South India. But remember the beautiful things in that house.

Mr. WOLCOTT: Lovely.

Q: Was that the new embassy house - the new Stone, wasn't it Stone?

Mr. WOLCOTT: I think it was Stone. But they lived in a separate house, but I think it was their choice. They didn't live in the residence. They preferred to live in an Indian house as I recall it. They had their own house with an Indian car. They didn't have an American Cadillac.

Q: You know, I seem to remember somewhere, reading somewhere, that the first night they arrived in New Delhi, the embassy residence was so vast that they all clustered together and slept together in one bedroom. Now why does that stick in my mind? Did you ever hear that story?

Both: No.

WOLCOTT: I can believe it, though.

Q: I can't imagine where I read it, but I do remember that.

WOLCOTT: Yes. What a lovely woman. What taste.

Mr. WOLCOTT: Beautiful taste.

WOLCOTT: But of course the fabrics in India - you could just go crazy with them.

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BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Leon O. Wolcott

Date entered Service: 1959 Left Service: 1968

Posts:

1959-61	Tehran, Iran
1961-63	Lahore, Pakistan
1964-65	Tehran, Iran
1965-66	Washington, DC
1966-67	Cairo, Egypt
1967-68	New Delhi, India

Status: Retired AID spouse

Date/place of birth: June 7, 1910; Montclair, NJ
Year of Death: 1990

Maiden Name: Marion Post

Parents:

Walter Post, M.D.
Marion L. Hoyt, Nurse (assisted Margaret Sanger with founding of birth control clinics)

Education:

Edgewood, Greenwich, CT
New School for Social Research, NYC
New York University
University of Vienna, Austria

Date and place of marriage:
June 5, 1941; Maryland

Profession:

Elementary School Teacher
Photographer - Staff, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin and Farm Security Admin. Documentary Project, Washington, DC

Children: Two stepchildren: Gail Voit, John Wolcott

Two children: Linda W. Moore, Michael D. Wolcott

End of interview