

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

**PHYLLIS E. HECHTMAN**

*Interviewed By: Jewell Fenzi*  
*Initial Interview Date: January 13, 1994*

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**INTERVIEW**

*Q: This is Jewel Fenzi on Thursday, January 13, 1994. I'm interviewing Phyllis Hechtman at AAFSW [Association of American Foreign Service Women]. It is the first in a number of ways: It is the first interview conducted at the new AAFSW offices and the first for 1994.*

HECHTMAN: Our first post was Chile. We first came to the Washington, DC area in 1964 right after we were married in Brooklyn, New York. Our families said why are you moving so far away? (as we came to the DC area.) I don't think any of the older generation had any idea of where or what Santiago, Chile was. They learned the meaning of the term Far Away in 1966. Both my and my husband's mother came South to Chile to visit us, each in her own time. We came home with our son, Douglas, who was born in Santiago in January 1970; he was about nine months old when we got back to the DC area. We left at that time because the AID program was pulling back because of the election results - Salvador Allende had been elected and it was not clear where relations would lead.

Life in Chile was really very wonderful; this was a long time ago, and I still have friends there (in Santiago). In fact, when my son was in high school I wanted to take him back to Chile (1986), (before he would reach eighteen - he could be detained by the military rulers - his passport, even though it is a U.S. passport, indicates Chile as place of birth. I wasn't about to risk his life!) to show him where he had been born. All our friends who were still there were absolutely wonderful and treated us so royally. I have never forgotten that. One family is "Chilean Chilean" - of Hispanic background (as opposed to indigenous population or immigrants from other countries.) Chile was pretty good about accepting people seeking refuge before, during and after the World War II periods. There is a fairly large Jewish community. There are a lot on the other side (so to speak) also. I

remember we took a trip down south during Xmas week to an area which is known as a German speaking area. That was a very interesting experience, because as you walked in the streets, you heard as much German as Spanish or English. Chile is a very cosmopolitan country, particularly (in) Santiago. And it was very interesting living there.

*Q: And what was the political climate like? Were you friendly with the Chileans? the local society?*

HECHTMAN: Chileans are wonderful people. I'm not talking about the upper strata, the government the Ministries, diplomats, etc. Although we occasionally attended such functions, we were not on any Diplomatic lists. At that time we were only on Official Passports. I also began to learn about the hierarchy of diplomacy and officialdom, about which I had almost no knowledge at that point.

We were there during the election campaign period (1970). We agreed to stay until the elections took place. The AID program pulled back after the elections in which Allende (a confirmed Socialist-Marxist) became President, but it never totally closed down. Programs such as milk for school children continued to be provided, but technical assistance more or less ended.

We were ready to come home. Which we did at the end of September of that year. We didn't have any school concerns because my son was a baby. We agreed to stay until the results of the elections were announced.

*Q: Your husband was always in population control?*

HECHTMAN: No. He started in Project Operations. He ultimately went on to be population control officer. Everybody in population control ended up, generally, having boys. I don't know what that signified.

When we came home it was almost winter. We had the baby, but no home; we moved into an apartment in Arlington, Virginia. My husband had applied for some economics training at FSI, and it was approved for a six month period. He then spent twenty-five hours a day studying. That was a rough time. One of the reasons I had encouraged my husband to come home was that I wanted to know what it was like to be an American spouse without the benefits of a maid and gardener, to have no built in baby-sitter, in short, be a typical American housewife and mother. And we came home, and I learned. Very quickly.

There was a lot of construction going on in Fairfax County, and we spent time driving around on the weekends just to get to know the neighborhoods, as well as for a change of pace. We found a house we liked and decided to buy it. When we next were assigned to an overseas post, (Guatemala in 1976) we rented it out. We are still in that house now and have only a few years remaining to pay on our mortgage.

Both of us are only children; I thought it was terrible. He thought it was wonderful, because he was fussed over and spoiled by aunts and uncles, and other adults. I thought it wasn't, that it wasn't a good idea (to have just one child to focus all hopes and plans on). He said he could talk to me again when we are back overseas (the implication being when we would again have the help of a live-in-maid). This said a lot to me.

When we were getting ready to go to Guatemala I was going through the crawl space where we store things not needed all the time. He asked me what I was doing, and I explained that I was getting rid of the "baby equipment". It was obvious that we're not going to have another child. Even if I became pregnant right away, there would still be almost another year before a baby would be born, and there would be six years between. I did not want two 'only children'. I came to the conclusion that I could be a good wife to my husband, a good mother for my son, and I think I've succeeded. We've managed to stay married for almost 30 years.

Our son had his early education in Guatemala, where at the age of five or six he was young enough to learn another language with ease. I thought this was wonderful. I had to work very hard to learn to speak Spanish. (While in Spanish class at FSI the instructor asked both of us if we had ever studied Spanish or any other language before. I had studied Hebrew from third grade in elementary school and spoke it well. My husband had Spanish in high school, while I had studied French as well as Hebrew; early exposure to another language is very helpful.)

He (our son) still speaks Spanish; he took the Foreign Service exam in 1992; he did well, but didn't "make the cut" to be appointed anywhere. He did well in college, graduating in 1992 from The College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. His ability to communicate in Spanish helped him get his first job here in the DC area.

I was very glad that my son had the opportunity to learn Spanish as early as he did. His first grade teacher in Guatemala was someone he thought was wonderful. If she said something, it was true, regardless of reality. He was in an international school called the Colegio Maya. There was a very broad range of students. I was very active and involved out of concern for my son and his education. I was concerned about the quality of education; the school was in a very poor physical circumstance, and I hoped that the educational quality was not of that same poor level. Since we got to Guatemala when we did, and three days later experienced a major earthquake (grade 7.3) which threw us out of bed at 3 a.m.; I am not too good when I am awakened at that hour (in that manner). When I think about it today, I remember that so vividly! There was so much noise, of the glass breaking, things falling and while the building didn't come tumbling down around us (close), it was very frightening. All schools in the entire country were closed for several weeks to avoid disputes about the rich children who were in schools that were in good condition, while the children in the poorer schools and neighborhoods would not have been safe.

The Embassy inspected all the housing of the American diplomatic community, and the

building we were in was declared unsafe. (The temporary apartment provided by AID for the new arrivals.) The enormity of what happened there was mind boggling, and very scary. We moved in with the Deputy Director of the AID mission and his wife, (Fred and Sarah Schieck) whom we had known years before, in Chile. Their house was in zone 9, right near the airport. This was a new airport that had been built to accommodate modern jet traffic. Huge 747s. They were unable to find adequate housing, other than in zone 9 (even before the earthquake).

*Q: What did the zones mean?*

HECHTMAN: The zones meant sections of the city. Zone 9 was where the airport was located. This was in 1976. I remember standing in the kitchen of that apartment (the day before the earthquake) seeing a 747 coming at me, as if it were going to land in my living room. But then it just flew on over the aqueduct and landed safely. I remembered what Sarah had said earlier, and why she didn't want to live in zone 9. But when the Embassy declared the building unsafe, and there was no other temporary housing (even the major hotels were damaged.) Sarah and Fred invited us to stay with them for the time, and so we moved in with them. We stayed with them for the better part of a month. Something I did a little later, was find out about the zones, and drew up a diagram explaining it all. It's very logical, if you understand it. There was no written information. When I asked people where I could buy things, where I could do certain things, people would say: I'll have to take you there. This information sheet and diagram which I wrote up, later went into the information kit given to **all** newcomers, not just AID, not just Embassy, but all of them.

*Q: This was through the American Women's Club?*

HECHTMAN: Interesting question. I did it for myself, and others who might have the kind of difficulty I had been having.

*Q: Do you still have a copy of that?*

HECHTMAN: No. I doubt it. Maybe in Guatemala.

Our lives in the Foreign Service have been associated with three posts, Chile, Guatemala and Panama. I don't remember the order in which my husband dealt with the offices here in the Washington area. He dealt with Chile affairs after Allende was overthrown. When we first had started out to go abroad, we had the choice of both Chile and Guatemala. He brought home both Post reports, they both sounded so wonderful, we couldn't decide. In the office the next day he got a call from the Chile desk, saying that they wanted to know his decision. He said, I'll take it (the position). Then the Guatemala desk called, wanting to know his decision. He apologized, saying that he had already decided to accept the Chile position. I was (in retrospect) very relieved. I think at that time the Ambassador in Guatemala had been recently assassinated. Things I had no idea about. Terrorism, guerilla movements, etc. It was several years later that we went to Guatemala. And then we had the earthquake. Also a different time of life, having this child to be responsible for. He

was terrified. We are brought up knowing the ground beneath our feet is solid, and then suddenly it wasn't. How do you deal with a child who is also semi-hysterical?

*Q: Did you do more or less the same thing at the three posts? Your son was born in the last year of your tour (in Chile); you really had four years of relative freedom as a spouse.*

HECHTMAN: I was involved with AFS (American Field Service), helping the youngsters practice their English conversation. Then through somebody I had known in a book club, I was put in touch with a little 'alternative' school for those who came at an unusual time of the school year. South of the Equator the school year is totally reversed from the northern hemisphere. Children who had been in one grade and then found themselves completely thrown off. There was this 'pro-tem' school using the Calvert School correspondence system, and the University of Nebraska on the high school level, and they needed a couple of tutors to help students get back on track and move on to the approved school. Learning about the Calvert System was very interesting; I had never heard about it, didn't know anything about it, never dealt with it before. The Calvert School has a full curriculum, lessons, instructions. Ultimately, all work and papers are sent to Baltimore. All of us were the tutors, there to help, on a daily basis, if the children were having problems with any of the work. They send back tests, grades, and suggestions. I went to work in this school, which was a good experience.

My mother-in-law is a retired elementary school principal in New York City. When she learned I was working in this school for an incredible (small) salary, she was dismayed. But it was something just for me, something that got me up every morning, to do something useful; I enjoyed it tremendously. I didn't need the money to pay the rent or buy food. Later, when the building the school was meeting in was going to be sold or destroyed, I found through another friend, who had an "out" building, which she wanted to rent out. I was able to arrange for the head of the school and my friend to negotiate, and they came to an agreement, so the school could continue operating. It all worked out very nicely. I wasn't interested in getting money out of it, I was doing something useful, enjoying it, and dealing with a friend.

*Q: Were these international children or were they mostly American?*

HECHTMAN: This school was mostly, or almost exclusively American. Either AID or State Department, a few were military. We did have a Milgroup in Santiago in those days. When I think back about this experience, it was very enjoyable, and interesting, because the people were wonderful. I was doing something that took some advantage of my background as a teacher, but also I felt comfortable with the people. I'm a "people person". I enjoyed working with them.

*Q: This is what I'm trying to get at. What I've been hearing from you. That you're not dealing with the upper class, but middle class.*

HECHTMAN: Many are very wealthy.

Both my husband and I came from modest circumstances. Not just that we are only children, but both my husband and I were raised by single mothers. I never knew my father; and my husband's father died when he was about eighteen months old. So he didn't know his father, either. He had the advantage of having his mother a professional; also his grandmother lived with them, providing automatic day-care. I have no recollection of most of the people who were responsible for taking care of me, except for the Irish family who lived across the street. They had two sons. We had a very good relationship, and I had a very ecumenical upbringing. Margaret used to take me from the public school to Hebrew school on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, then she took me along to Mass on Friday afternoons, in her Catholic church in Brooklyn. Years later when we went to Great Britain we had a choice of visiting either Scotland or Ireland, in addition to England and Wales, and I chose to visit Ireland; I even kissed the Blarney Stone. That was very satisfying to me, growing up hearing all about the 'Blarney'. That was the root of multicultural awareness, which extends to my son, with his somewhat different background. I didn't get overseas until after I was married. My son was six when we went to Guatemala, where he went to school from first through fourth grades.

When he was in the second grade, he came home one day and told me that his teacher was Jewish (his second grade teacher). This was around Christmas time, in a very Catholic country. He said he had been feeling uncomfortable because he must be the only Jewish person in the class. She said, "No, you're not, I'm Jewish". I was skeptical, and talked to her a few days later. I offered to explain to the children why we do not have Christmas, and what our holiday, Hanukkah, is all about. I also made cookies in the special shapes for Hanukkah. It went over very well, She was a little uneasy, because she wasn't supposed to be teaching religion, but I explained that it was historical information about the first struggle for religious freedom. When Easter time came, I was able to logically relate Easter and Christianity to Passover, and I explained the connections between them. I simply wanted to explain for my son's benefit so he would never be in the position of feeling odd or unhappy about what and who he is. I also try to explain each of the holidays in the Jewish calendar to him. I think he has made peace with all of the differences of religions and cultures that he has learned about. The Irish family I knew when I was young always had something for me under their Xmas tree, and I always gave something to their younger son. I've lost contact with them now, since my mother died in 1982.

1982 was an important year in my life. That was the year we returned from Panama, (our last overseas post) where we had been living since August 1980. We came back in March; Douglas was in the sixth grade. My husband had been offered the position to deal with Caribbean Affairs. I was tired of the tropics, though I had finally gotten used to Panama. It was lovely to look out of my window and see the boats lining up to go through the Canal every morning. That was beautiful, but I really didn't like Panama, because it was not a place where there was a change of seasons (as I knew them). There were only two seasons: hot or hotter and wet or wetter. That was awful, I remember it ... that stays



with me.

But as a teacher myself, I was always concerned with education. Our son attended fifth and sixth grades in Panama, after the initial turnover of the Canal (Zone) to Panama, in one of the DoD elementary schools called Diablo Heights, where his teacher was a very old fashioned teacher; one who demanded that the students do things "right up and down"; you must learn your multiplication tables, your additions, and subtractions, which I thought he had missed the entire time in Guatemala (grades 1-4); yes, he learned to speak good Spanish, but he really didn't get many of the basics I thought were important. But I had never been an elementary school teacher -- the closest I got was when I worked in the Calvert school, back in Chile.

I supported my husband's thinking of taking this job, and I certainly was ready to come home. But we came home from the sixth grade in Panama, for Douglas to finish sixth grade in the school in which he had started kindergarten before we left to go to Guatemala. We had to go out and buy him some winter clothing, because we didn't have any in Panama, and it was very cold here. I contacted the local elementary school, and yes, they had some of his records; he went there from kindergarten to sixth, and then the county closed the school and turned it into a Senior Center. His class was the last graduating class there. *[Begin side B; Tape 1]*

We were back in Washington, between Chile and Guatemala.

*Q: That was an interesting time, here. That was the eve of the '72 Directive. Did you get involved in that in any way?*

HECHTMAN: My son was very little; I'm not sure I even joined AAFSW at that time. I joined it when we were in Guatemala, I joined it then because I finally had a better sense of being a part of the Foreign Service, (having gone through the earthquake, and wanting to make contact with others who had undergone various levels of stresses because of this kind of life (this mobile lifestyle).

*Q: So when you first went to Santiago in 1966 you didn't feel a part of it?*

HECHTMAN: No I didn't. We had only been married a short time, life was very new. And because I am an only child, living with another body, never having had siblings to deal with all my life. Neither had my husband. That was not a major part of my life. Going to Santiago that first time -- that was an adventure for me. I had been teaching in the District, at Gordon Jr. High School. I taught Health and Physical Education, which is my field and why I had sought that job. That was a very interesting year here. I am still in touch with the woman who was my co-teacher. The District was very conscious of balance (black/white). We were two female and two males (teachers). There should have been one of each (race). I was hired at the last minute to replace the black female who was on very extended sick leave. I got involved in the school, it was a fascinating experience; I enjoyed my work there and the people I was dealing with. I found an

interesting difference in the community, compared to what I grew up with in Brooklyn. When I was growing up in Brooklyn, there were blacks, it was a mixed community. But by and large, in the neighborhood I lived in, the blacks were the ones who broke into the homes, when those sorts of things happened. It was a lower class of people. Here I was meeting and becoming friends with blacks who are professionals. It's a different social level in Washington, than what I knew in, what I have to say, is another lifetime, a whole different, way of life.

The experience I've had in the Foreign Service has also been interesting. We had a very good maid, who I encouraged to go back to school and complete her high school education. She knew how to read and write. She had asked me for some extra time off to learn to be a beautician. I responded by agreeing to give her the time, but only if she would use it to complete her high school education. I helped her with the basic enrollment fee, she then paid the monthly fees. She was too intelligent and talented to be a domestic servant for the rest of her life. She ultimately completed her "secundaria" (high school) education, and took the (country-wide) exam for entry into the university (University of Chile); eventually she got a job teaching in a small nursery school, or kindergarten. She was wonderful with children; I had a great deal of satisfaction from this ... I had helped this young woman better herself. It was my own personal Peace Corps project.

*Q: How long did that take? The entire time you were in Chile?*

HECHTMAN: It was sort of toward the end ... it was our last year in which I encouraged her to go to school. She continued going to school while she worked for someone else (after we left). At one point my husband went back to Chile as Chile Desk Officer for AID, after the demise of Allende; I had written to her and told her that my husband was going to be in Chile again and that she could contact him through the AID Mission. We had agreed to give her some money for a gift at that time. He was able to make contact with her, and did give her the cash as a present. Ultimately, we did lose contact with her; I don't know what ever happened to her, if she ever married, what she's doing.

*Q: I think it's interesting. You first went overseas in 1966, and that was still a time of enforced volunteerism. You never mentioned that. Were you a bit apart as a young AID wife or did you create that apartness yourself?*

HECHTMAN: I think so. Possibly I did it myself, simply because I did not feel as if I were a part of the State Department. Which I'm not, and never have been. Being a foreign service spouse is only tangential to that because I have never really had to deal with the protocol, and the (diplomatic entertaining) functions. We've been to such functions because of my husband's position. But again, I have always had a somewhat second class sense of "because we're AID" we are not of the same level -- and because our passports were not Diplomatic passports...

*Q: You had Official passports?*

HECHTMAN: Someone actually said as much to me ... because we didn't have Diplomatic passports. I didn't get a Diplomatic passport until ... I think, Panama. So we're talking, perhaps 15-16 years, near the end. And the reason that I joined AAFSW when I did, was that I needed the support of other people, and the understanding of what it's like, from the spouse perspective in which you have to be ... you're expected to be responsible, to support this person, the employee. This is well before tandem couples, or anything like that. In Chile what I did was the sort of stuff I would have done here, as a person living in the community; I couldn't work beyond what I was doing in that little school.

*Q: Did you go to the embassy for language lessons? Where did you learn the Spanish?*

HECHTMAN: We had Spanish training at FSI before (Chile). My husband was given ... not the full course, it was the old green books, the big forty-four lesson course. I was given permission to take it; I remember studying endlessly. Our teacher was an interesting person, she had kind of a fight with the administration of the Foreign Service Institute in the way they were operating the program. She knew that we only had two months for the course, and felt that what she wanted to do ... here was a group of students with exceptional ability, and she wanted to take them as far as she could push them (us) and she did. We would go home every day and study the dialogues, the grammar, and all of this stuff, every single day. It was the most exhausting ... experience!!

I said I had gone to a Hebrew Day School, but I was learning that from the fifth grade on. I had after school Hebrew classes when I was in the second and third grades (of public elementary school) and I did very well, so they skipped me from Hebrew 1 to Hebrew 3, and then I received the scholarship to the Hebrew Day School at the same synagogue. So I left the public school and went into the fifth grade. The other kids in that class had been there since grade one, starting their Hebrew along with other subjects in English. I'll never forget this one, either: It was Columbus Day -- Friday, when I started to go to that school; but the public schools had that as a holiday. I guess I've resented that all my life!

*Q: So how long did you study Spanish at FSI?*

HECHTMAN: We were given, I think it was two months of the four month course, but because she pushed us, knowing that we only had two months. And that she was able to swing her weight and at least get to use us as her experiment. She, Mrs. Hortensia Berry, an exiled Cuban lawyer, and another teacher, who was Argentinian, who I believe may still be there. Mrs. Berry used to lament that at that time: "No hay Cuba Libre", referring to the drink, as well as the Castro regime. We began to learn things about humor and word-play in Spanish, of the sort that I enjoy very much in English. So I learned well under that pressured circumstance; it was important to me, and because as spouses we have to deal with the local shopkeepers, the maids, the plumber, whereas most of **his** assistants in the offices are hired in those offices because they can speak English! So he never had the ability that I developed, plus he doesn't have the same natural talent for language that I apparently have. That's what Mrs. Berry had said when she asked us if we had ever taken another language in high school or college. Robert admitted having taken

high school Spanish. But in high school I had not only French, but Hebrew, because I could get Regents credit in New York for my Hebrew as well. Admittedly the French was strictly classroom. I never spoke French as well as I spoke the Hebrew then, nor as well as I speak Spanish now. I have a lot of Hispanic friends now; one woman who is the head of Spanish language translators and interpreters for the Justice Department. This is the real stuff -- I'm not talking 'Mickey Mouse'. She has a strong Spanish accent in her English, and I'm sure I have an English accent in my Spanish.

A very interesting thing occurred in Chile. A little old man, in the wine section of a Supermarket, asked me (in Spanish) if I could read the label and tell him the price of the bottle of wine he wanted to buy. When I answered him, (in Spanish) he said to me (in Spanish) Spanish is not your first language, what is? I said English. He said "Ingles o Norteamericano?" That really startled me, and I admitted that it is Norteamericano. We went on from there in just a brief discussion of Americans, I was afraid of getting involved in a political argument, because Chileans did that sort of thing. But they were very interesting in that way. Somehow I have managed to keep up my Spanish, but I can hear my husband speaking, and he doesn't do as well. I have had the very nice experience of people saying to me that I speak Spanish very well.

We went to Mendoza, Argentina twice, and while there I went to the beauty parlor to have my hair done, on both occasions at least a year apart. The head beautician thought he recognized me, I thought he was being 'cute.' He couldn't be sure where I was from, he couldn't figure out my accent. He thought I was from Brazil and that my accent could be from my speaking Portugues. I wasn't tagged as a "Gringa"!

*Q: Did you continue your lessons in Santiago?*

HECHTMAN: Yes, and I finished the course. The teacher that we had really "stuck it to us" saying we would have to go back. We had completed the forty or so lessons, and then we had a month preparing to go. We had November and December in Spanish courses at FSI and then we had January packing and doing whatever to get ready to go. We left here at the very end of January. We left from New York because we had not quite cut our ties. There was a terrible snowstorm that year. Everything was closing down and we had to call constantly to the airport to see if the plane was going to go. I remember ironing my husband's shirt at the last moment. I said if they'll take us to the airport, if that plane is going to go, I want to be on it. I'm tired of sitting around. Yes, we made it. In those days, the flight was more than fourteen hours from New York, and we were given an overnight stop to break up the lengthy trip. What we planned to do was stay in Lima for a day or two visiting a friend. This got us to Santiago on February 3, 1966. It was a night and day change. We came from a snowstorm, to beautiful summer in Santiago. It was truly a wonderful experience. I think we were the youngest ones in the entire Mission. We were only in our ... less than twenty-five. We were children. This was our first overseas post. My husband's boss and his wife, Marvin and Dory Smith, were absolutely marvelous to us. I developed an enormous crush on him. I think they had several kids, a son and a pair of twins. I think we, in age were right in between. So we were substitute kids, for them,

and they were substitute parents for us. They took us places, helped us acclimate. As soon as I could, I got into Spanish classes at the AID Mission, which was in a separate building from the Embassy. The teacher did not like our accents. She was trying to work on the same system so intensively as what little I had at FSI, so intensively, in that short period of time, and needing to use it was not enough. I needed to use this language, to live there. It was a wonderful learning experience.

Many years later, I think I said this already, I took my son to Chile, so that he could meet all these people, that I still consider my earliest friends in the Foreign Service. We still exchange Xmas cards with many of them. I wrote in advance to tell them we were planning to visit Chile that year. I had met other people in the community, who weren't necessarily Diplomats, the "ex-pat" business community. I subsequently lost track of a lot of them, after Allende came to power. Unless I happened to run into them again (in another post). But again, we evolved in terms of family. And then our next post (after five years in the Washington area) was Guatemala.

I was very active in Guatemala, focused on school. I did not join a book club, but my Spanish improved, as I got along. A mistake I made, thinking that since I did well in Chile, I could do so as well in Guatemala. But people thought I spoke Spanish so well that I had no problem, but the colloquialisms in Guatemala are totally different from the ones I had gotten to know in Chile. It was like another world -- it **was** a different world. We had to really think about this, and not complain too much. because there was nothing we could do about it. The fact that Guatemala was Guatemala, and Chile was Chile, and the people we had been meeting in Chile, and getting to know as friends were so very warm and "sympatico". I'm still in touch with some of them to this day, thirty years later. I have no contact with anyone I knew in Guatemala; but some of my Guatemalan experiences certainly have stayed with me, (not to mention the earthquake.) But so much of it is because of my child, and things that I did on that level of life. I told you about the activities I was involved in with the PTA [Parent Teacher Association], and the school. I was the PTA president in our last year at that post. Our son was in the fourth grade. I was able to do that because I saw the need for somebody who had both an education background and concern with the school and could be an intermediary with the administration. I also was not afraid to speak in a group meeting situation, and could do so in Spanish, (asking indulgence for my imperfect command of the language.) This was originally a Co-operative School but it had approval from the State Department. Overseas Schools Office. I still see names that go back to that time, and I can't believe it!

The whole environment, the temperament of the population, and ways of behaving were so different. My impression in Guatemala is, they will shoot first, and ask questions afterwards. That's what life was like. Right after the earthquake, one of the things that was decreed by the President (Kjell Laugerud), to prevent looting, and avoid violence, or anything like that, because of the devastation and because the schools were being closed; was that the strongest measures would be used (shooting on sight). This was something I could not imagine. This was so far away from anything I had ever known or expected. It certainly wasn't in the Post Report!

I did help in rewriting the Post Report, because obviously the one we had received was seriously out of date, and the Admin Officer had asked for help in getting the job accomplished. Seventeen of the nineteen provinces of the country were terribly damaged. I think I wrote something and sent it back (to the State Department). This was the first time we had APO facilities. I'm trying to remember if we had it in Chile; I'm not sure we did, way back then. We lived a great deal on the local market and supplies. The Commissary wasn't very good. We used it for liquor and cigarettes, and other items that were extremely expensive, or unavailable locally.

I also remember, a funny thing, which has nothing to do with Foreign Service, *per se*. My mother came to visit and she was kind of distressed by the quality of the toilet paper that we were using, which was local.

*Q: This was Guatemala?*

HECHTMAN: No this was Chile. But it's something that sticks in my mind from 'a hundred years' ago. After she went home, she sent me a gift as a thank you ... and apparently the two packages that she sent got separated, but I didn't know this. I received a box of some very nice hand soap, some bathroom toilet soap. I wrote a thank you note, because I was well taught by my mother, and she received my thank you note and wondered what happened to the other part of the gift, which was a box -- and this came the next day ... or two days later ... it was just a question of the timing -- a huge carton of sixteen rolls of Macy's Finest toilet paper! Well, after you've battled with "turista", or whatever it was that we used to call it in those days, "Chile-itis", you could appreciate Macy's Finest quality ... and this has been a long term joke in our family about those niceties. When she got my note on the soap, she contacted Macy's and said that we had never received the other part of the gift, and so, two weeks later we received another carton of those same vital luxuries. We were very well provided in that department. This is something that stays in my head. Because my mother was my mother, and she felt it was important that her darling daughter have appropriate supplies in her bathroom. Which I was very grateful for, at that point in life.

*Q: Did you have any other training before you went to Chile, or Guatemala? Spouse training at FSI? Did you have any of those courses, or was it only the language?*

HECHTMAN: It was only the language, and we didn't get any other language training when we went to Guatemala because we didn't need it, by then.

Actually, I do remember a little bit of information on protocol, leaving your cards with the Ambassador's wife, who else you were expected to call on, but I viewed this as very superficial and irrelevant to my life... As far as I was concerned, I wasn't in the Foreign Service. We were serving our country. We were posted to Chile as FSR-L (Foreign Service Reserve-Limited). At some point he was offered the opportunity to remove the 'L' status, and he accepted, with my acquiescence.

The rest, as we can say, is history. Robert has retired at the end of September 1993 as a Senior Foreign Service Officer, having been in charge of over a billion dollars of the Food for Peace Program, in conjunction with the World Food Programme, a United Nations Agency headquartered in Rome, Italy.

Back to the question of language skills rating:

*Q: Were you tested?*

HECHTMAN: I was tested in Panama, and received a 3, 3 rating.

Another anecdote that is coming up ... another friend of ours, an American USAID friend; most of my friends tended to be from the group of spouses that were connected with AID. I didn't make real distinctions.

*Q: It just happened that way.*

HECHTMAN: I have a friend, Nancy Johnson (my first friend in Chile-USAID) who said to me, whose three children I have known since babyhood, or even infancy as she has known mine ... How come do you, or why do you seek out or identify with Jewish people? I don't attempt to find them, but somehow we have known each other ... Because there are, as I said to her, five thousand years of history in common. And while I'm not active in a local synagogue or any Jewish group, my husband was never Bar Mitzvah'd, my son was never Bar Mitzvah'd, I have had the most training in our family ever. And I'm always the one who is asked the questions about something. I have a book of stories for every holiday that has ever come up, and I read them all to my son so that he should know and have some idea of his background. Because someday, I hope not, he might have some sort of negative experience simply because he is a Jew. And it happened in Guatemala. Someone who is not an important person in the school, I think it was a bus driver, who somehow knew this and called him some kind of name that made reference specifically, not Gringo, but Jew. And that upset me. And this person, I don't know who he was, he was a bus driver, so I don't consider him an upper class person, and certainly the teachers and the professionals in that school would not have done that, but somebody who is a bus driver and who has little education of his own, I can see, but I didn't want my son subjected to that sort of thing. This goes back to my going into the school and teaching not the religion, but explaining the rationale behind fighting for the freedom to worship as one chooses.

We spent a lot of time in Guatemala going to Antigua and learning the colonial history of so much of Guatemala; all of that has fascinated me. We've done all the ruins in Guatemala; we used to take side trips, weekend trips with friends. We went once to Copan (Honduras). I've made three trips to Tikal, and each time have climbed the pyramids there. That is a phenomenal experience! That has been a part of me ... I've always been interested in history and sort of archeology. My son, if he saw anything that was like a ruin or a set of stairs, he would climb it. Even if it didn't go any place. We've

had some very interesting experiences in Guatemala, with all the ruins, and we made a point of visiting everything. Guatemala City is built on one of the earliest Mayan ruins -- Kaminaljuyu. And you could find something in the City that could still be visited. (At least you could see it then). It was very, very interesting in that regard; the historical aspects of Guatemala. We went with some other friends to Copan, (in Honduras) which was a rather large trip, and we had to stay over there. I felt proud that we had visited four of the five major Mayan sites in Central America, in the time that we lived in Guatemala, and there was one that we didn't visit on our two "once in a lifetime trips". That's another story.

My husband had said to me he had a friend or a colleague who lived in Orlando, and traveled between there and Guatemala City; since we were leaving home and we weren't able to have the usual birthday party for our son for his sixth birthday at the end of January, we could take him to Disney World, and then drive all the way to Guatemala. My husband told me that he had said we would get there on January 31, 1976 so we could plan the trip; this is the first of my major trip plannings. We took the Auto-train south to Orlando, we spent three days at Disney World; (this was before Epcot); set out and drove, on the advice of this young man, with whom I spent an hour on the phone. I said: I think we're taking on too much, we're traveling with a six year old child. This young man (who was single) said, "No Problem". Okay, said I. We did do it. We did this "Once in a lifetime trip" and we were utterly exhausted, and I said to my husband when we got there, you're absolutely right, this was a once in a life time opportunity ... It will never happen again! Two years later we did repeat the journey at my instigation, because we were coming back for our second tour in Guatemala. We had missed something. I had missed the fifth major Mayan site, which is Palenque, which couldn't really be reached from Guatemala City, because you had to go back up into Mexico. So what I did was arrange the second "once in a lifetime trip", for us to take the other route into Guatemala City. We came in that first time via the south coast, through Escuinapa. The second trip we came in via the highland route, through Tuxtla Gutiérrez and San Cristóbal de Las Casas, where there is currently an uprising of the campesino population. I'm hearing this on the radio right now. It was a charming little town then and I'm sure it is now. I haven't followed the issues very thoroughly. I don't know what the Mexican government plans to do. So that was the second once in a lifetime opportunity; we got there (Guatemala) fine, and there was no further earthquake.

One of the other things that I did after the earthquake, I joined a spouse group; I needed something to keep me busy, keep me occupied. There was a crafts group that was forming, among the spouses. It was a Macramé group, I joined it and was learning how to do this, and I suddenly realized I had done this before, when I was a child. I did all these lanyards, when I was a kid ... and this is macramé. The stitching ... I knew stitches that the teacher couldn't teach me because I knew them already, but I was older than she, then. That was a very interesting experience. I still have some of those macramé plant hangers.  
*[End of tape]*

*Continuation of interview: June 7, 1994*



*[Tape begins with a lot of fuzzy, indistinct discussion about the States in Mexico where these events were occurring. The state where the uprising was occurring. It was Campeche.]*

HECHTMAN: I have enjoyed so many of our trips which have been in Mexico. One of the things we did, we went with our son for vacation ... to Oaxaca, he was still in High School. One of his teachers, it could have been his Spanish teacher, or his biology teacher, who knew we were going there, and asked him to bring back a hammock from the market in Oaxaca. Oaxaca is an old colonial town, and Douglas, having learned the art of bargaining in the markets in Guatemala (especially in Chichicastenango and Antigua) was able to buy the hammock for his teacher at a good price. We then went to the beach on the coast, not Acapulco, (I still have never been there) but a newer resort -- it was Ixtapa.

We went to Cancun, in 1977 for a Valentine's Day weekend on a tourism promotion, from Guatemala. Cancun was brand new at that time; what they were doing then was trying to keep it as pristine and pleasant, in reaction to what had occurred in Acapulco in terms of making it over "touristified" and commercialized. And Cancun was lovely. We ended up going from Guatemala, with friends (Barry and Susan Sidman) in the AID mission. We stayed at the Camino Real, on the bay for the weekend. It was absolutely beautiful. We rented a car with the Sidmans and took a drive. We found a proposed, but not yet opened, new facility, which turned out to be Club Med. We were not guests of Club Med, we just happened to drive in at that time. We asked if we could swim in their pool, and they let us. Barry then climbed what at that time was the highest pyramid in that part of Mexico. A huge pyramid. We have movies of that. We did this without Douglas. He must have been staying with one of his friends. I guess from way back, I felt relatively comfortable about leaving him with friends, or with an employee who was a responsible maid. So we have done this, and he's turned out all right.

*Q: It seems to me that you've established a pattern in Santiago, that you've really developed your own interests, and that you didn't let your life be dictated by what was happening in the Mission. Was there any difference when you went to Guatemala? That was after the '72 Directive. After you were a "free agent" supposedly as a spouse. Was there any difference in the attitude? Or did you just keep on doing what you'd always done?*

HECHTMAN: I think ... I do what I do, because it is both interesting and satisfying for me.

*Q: And the opportunity is there.*

HECHTMAN: Right. And it is something that involves learning something of my surroundings, particularly if they are not my own home. I'm in a new town, a new community, I would like to know as much as I can. Which I think is the best way to get to

know it and to be comfortable there, to learn about things. I'm not sure that my husband is the kind of person who would deliberately seek out ... it depends on what it is. I know he enjoys talking, and we talk with people, when he feels comfortable. He may try to do some consulting work, and the particular possibility involves ability to communicate in Spanish. He's very uneasy about this right now. I said we can practice, get some tapes and practice. We know what this is like, to do it again ... if he really wants to do it. I feel I'd have to brush up on my Spanish if I were going to live again in a Spanish speaking community. I understand why he is feeling uncomfortable; I have had such good success with my Spanish, but I always remember that man who asked me if I speak English or Northamerican. That puts me back in my place.

What I have done, I know that there are the kinds of activities where people who need to be visited in a hospital, (or other kinds of "good works" ) that has not been my focus. I have not been into that level of social work, nursing, etc. I'm better with children, with young people, even when I was teaching years ago; I really liked that age group (middle school). My first job here was in Junior High School and I remember the man who hired me; he was definitely trying to convince me to work on the elementary school level. But I had a degree in Health and Physical Education, which was definitely secondary level, and I really wasn't into elementary education. I realized that when my one child got beyond that level and could hold an intelligent conversation with an adult human being, I was happier. Much more comfortable.

I remember at one point, with my son, something had occurred, and instead of my saying "Don't you dare ... if you know what's good for you" ... I looked at it from a different perspective. I had just read a very good child psychology book. He had said something about "kicking the freshly painted wall." He made a point of acknowledging that we had painted the kitchen wall; whatever he was mad about, he was going to fix me, by kicking the freshly painted wall. I remember saying: if you're going to kick I suggest you go upstairs and put on your hard shoes, because you're just wearing soft sneakers, and you could hurt your foot. So go put on your shoes so you don't break your toe. He looked at me with incredulity, but he went upstairs and the whole confrontation was forgotten. He was perhaps three years old, if that much. This has never left me ...

There is something in terms of recognition of someone else's needs, in any situation; if you can acknowledge them and in some way work around them, or through them, it works ... much to your delight, surprise, even astonishment! This goes back to Guatemala ... As PTA president, I took on the job, knowing I didn't have any competition, nobody wanted to deal with that, it would be a lot of work. I had no enormous personal political goals out of this. But I just thought it was important, because I was developing a nice relationship with the director of the school; and she appreciated my ability to deal with her in Spanish, on a level where I could say: Wait, I don't understand, and she could ask me for explanations of English, for her problems. We had the same kind of level of understanding of the other person's language. My focus was to get things done in the school that would benefit the kids, particularly my son.

At that point, the school had an elementary school, and a high school level, and we were raising funds to build a new school because the physical facility that my son was in was incredible; the most primitive thing you could imagine. One of the things that the PTA did was sponsor a snack bar for safe and healthy lunches. We had to deal a lot with the local population, now this was truly an international school. There were children of all the communities, not just the Guatemalan, not just the American; I remember the Italian ambassador's daughter was one of our students, there were also some Korean and Chinese youngsters, as well as a few Dutch and Scandinavian students, so we had a real international school.

There had been some sort of snack bar earlier, and the kids could buy things, but it wasn't clear where this was being supplied from. It was like buying your tortillas on the corner. It wasn't clear who the person running it was, nor her connection to the school. I didn't know what kind of business it was. My son took his lunch to school; it was prepared at home by our maid, and if he wanted to buy a drink, like a Coke, he could. We, in the PTA ended up completely re-doing the snack bar. Among the families that had connection to the school were the Pepsi Cola Company. I had a friend, (Bev Grant -- I'm not sure if I still have her as a friend -- they live in California), but her son Stephen was my son's best friend, at least in Guatemala, and then later in Panama. Bev was not a foreign service spouse, in our sense of the term. Her husband was with the private sector, employed by the Bank of America. The Bank of America was instrumental in helping with loans for the new building. I don't remember where the plans came from. I was involved in the project, but it was so long ago, I don't remember any details.

What we did, was get the snack bar cleaned up and cleaned out; and we were able to arrange for a new supplier. There was a local pizza parlor, called "A Guy From Italy" which had wonderful pizza. He delivered them fresh every morning, and we sold them by the slice. Bev worked out the arrangement with the "Guy" so that we could make money on this. This whole snack bar operation became very successful; the Pepsi Cola Company gave us the proper equipment to sell drinks by the cup. We made a fortune out of this, and helped bankroll the new construction. We also sold raffle tickets, and had a Valentine's Day dance, to raise money for the new school construction.

At that time (early 1970s) there were only two schools approved by the State Department that our children could go to: The Colegio Americano and the Colegio Maya. The former was **the** private school for wealthy Guatemalans; they had to put a child's name on the waiting list for a place when they were infants, to get them in. Some of my friends sent their children there for whatever the reason. Their focus was English language instruction, continued schooling in an American curriculum, for later entry into U.S. colleges.

We have other Foreign Service friends, and he has also recently retired from the State Department; we first met in our "earliest lifetime" that is, in Chile. We were leaving as they were arriving, with their two daughters. Their younger daughter is the same age as my son. We have all known each other over the years, since Chile, in Virginia, and later in Guatemala. It has been very interesting to be party to the evolution of this friendship.

She is of Oriental background, her father was Chinese, and her mother was Honduran. She was born and raised in Honduras. So she is Hispanic and Oriental, married to a Jewish American Foreign Service Officer. I spoke with her when they were coming to Guatemala, and she asked me about the schools there, because we had children of the same age and in the same level of school. Her children were in the GT program (Gifted and Talented) in Fairfax County. I said she was lucky that they've had those years, because the schooling there in Guatemala was awful. I was having a difficult time dealing with Doug's schooling. His needs weren't being met, as I thought. He is very bright, but my thinking was focused on what I grew up with. He's having a totally different type of life; so all I can say is you have to go with it.

My husband and I recently talked about this whole thing, about the once in a lifetime trip ... I said well, where does serendipity come into it? He responded: "I'm trained to plan and anticipate problems." But when we drove down on this second "once in a lifetime trip" ... this time, instead of taking the same route, I planned the route, after having done it the first time with his friend's counsel, so that we could come in the other route, via the Highlands, and also bring in a new car (to replace the old one we had driven in the first time) instead of having it shipped in, we drove it in. This was part of my reasoning, this once in a lifetime opportunity came again. Plus providing the chance to see the things we hadn't seen the first time ... mainly that other major site of Mayan ruins ... Palenque. I have a magnificent picture of my son standing on top of one of the pyramids, framed in the doorway of one of the temples, with another one across from it; a scene that appears in many books printed about Palenque. It was wonderful ... it was hot as hell, it really was, but I do remember this. It was a very satisfying accomplishment, and trip. I have some wonderful pictures of that time.

*Q: We were talking about the school in Guatemala, and the friend who came down, with two girls ...*

HECHTMAN: She now teaches (Spanish) at the Foreign Service Institute. She had called me asking me about schools (when they were about to go to Guatemala (1977)). Her daughters ended up going to the Colegio Americano. We did a lot of things together because we were friends, we were friends because we lived here in Virginia. Our husbands didn't work directly together; he was with the State Department, mine has always been in USAID. But we have had some similar experiences, particularly when we're in the same country, particularly in Guatemala. With children of the same age. We have done a lot of outside of school activities together, as friends. Doing things this way, because our friends from home, are not there. The community we were attached to was what was there for us, and we participated in these things with them, mainly because we enjoyed them and we enjoyed the people; and when we could do things with the local population, all the better. In Guatemala we didn't do that very much, because Guatemalans were not enormously socially outgoing.

*Q: Did you still have guards? Children's school bus with guards?*

HECHTMAN: Interesting ... No. When we were getting ready to go to Guatemala, Robert said that they had removed the differential. There was a danger allowance for a while. I said, well, that's nice; that the situation has resolved; and so were not going to a post that has a danger, hardship allowance. I'd rather not have the situation, than have the situation, and get the extra money. The money is not what I want. What I want is tranquillity in my life, particularly because I'm dealing with a child. So we went happily to Guatemala, in this first once in a lifetime opportunity. When we got there, I said "Never again" and we did do it again, but under my control, in terms of planning. The difference was that we ended up going down the Gulf Coast, and ended up in Tampico, or maybe it was Veracruz. I think we got the last room available in a hotel anywhere in the whole town, because there was some sort of celebration and the town was overrun with visitors, local visitors, for the celebration. What happened was that it turned out to be the last room in this particular hotel, and it was facing the Plaza de Armas, the main square of the town. This is where Serendipity comes in. I said, Wow!! We ended up listening to the music, seeing it from the hotel, or we could go out and walk around the Plaza and enjoy the 'folklorico' entertainment, dancing and singing, fiesta activities. All night long ... totally unplanned. That is my focus: when things like this happen, I'm right there to take advantage of the opportunity, along with my son. This was wonderful. The first time we didn't have things like this. Our trip was so well planned, we just didn't count on the earthquake.

*Q: Over-organized ...*

HECHTMAN: Well, we had to; we went as far west as San Antonio (Texas). In San Antonio I saw what to me were the first Texas-size cockroaches. I'll never forget them, either. They were huge! And I was not happy about seeing them, or having them in my bathtub. So the second trip, we never went that far west; we went down the Gulf coast, reached Veracruz, from where we reached Palenque, and came over the mountains and entered Guatemala via the Highland route, where we went through Tuxtla Gutiérrez. It's a very nice town, very similar to what we were going back to in Guatemala, and very interesting. There was no unrest there at that particular moment.

*Q: So you could do all of that because there was no unrest.*

HECHTMAN: This was back in 1978. Douglas had just turned eight.

*Q: So there really were things going on in Chile and Guatemala and Panama City but you really sort of missed them all. Didn't you? You were there more or less at fairly tranquil times, in all three. Terrorism and unrest was no great problem for you ...*

HECHTMAN: Never. Never in Chile, and even in the period after Allende had been confirmed as having won the election, I do remember that night when we listened to the election returns, we were having some friends over for dinner and bridge, and watching on television the person, the commentator who made the announcement looking so incredibly crestfallen that he was announcing that the winner of the election was Allende;

that was obviously not his party. We just didn't quite know what was going to happen from this. I just knew that we were going to be leaving, anyway, but that didn't cut our ties, nor did it change the fact that we have loved those almost five years in Chile. Then later, in Guatemala, I certainly had found it a very interesting experience, we have never personally experienced any terrorism; Guatemala was relatively quiet; we may have been living under a military government; we were not involved in many activities which involved the diplomatic community *per se*. There were some, because they may have involved AID; but at that point we were not quite as high ranking in AID as we are at retirement. My husband has retired as a Senior Foreign Service Officer. I don't know what the grade numbers are, at this point I'm no longer interested in those details, those numbers. For me there is no personal prestige involved in this.

I am never going to be the Ambassador's wife ... in terms of Ambassadors' wives, and what that has done and/or meant to me: in Chile, the first ambassador under whom we served was Ralph Dungan, a political appointee; his wife, Mary was very involved in her family, which was a large Catholic family. In fact, Time magazine printed a commentary on the fact that Ambassador Dungan was unable to attend the opening of the International Population Conference in Santiago, because on that same day he was attending the birth of his eleventh child!! Next in Chile was another political appointee, Ambassador Edward Korry, and his wife Patricia, who was to my mind, the quintessential Ambassador's wife. Everything was done properly; she was a true professional Ambassador's wife. I didn't necessarily participate in a lot of Embassy activities, because I was not part of that community ... I was only a "poor step-sister" because I was an AID spouse, not a State Department wife. She was extremely nice, and part of this is her own personality, and also the protocol ... manners, the right things to do and so when Douglas was born, she came to pay a call on my son!! I was stunned. I remember it to this day. I was so impressed with her ... on a personal level ... She didn't owe me anything. It wasn't as if I was the Deputy Director's wife, even. I remember Helga Andrews, (the wife of the DCM in Guatemala, George Andrews) names that are coming out of the fog at me ... but I really don't remember for sure.

But again, I was a little more focussed on the school activities for the children. There was a project that AID dealt with in Chile, supporting "Centros de Madres" (Mothers' Centers) where women were encouraged and taught to do things that would be useful for them for the future, for helping their children, and for helping themselves gain skills for useful employment. I remember those terms, those names of things, that go back so far, in my history, and the impression of the Ambassador's wife who came and gave me a magnificent blue bathrobe for my newborn son. An elegant, expensive gift, not the sort of gift I even could give to **my** friends. I was so impressed with that. But in Chile at that time, most of my functioning revolved around anything with education, my son was not yet involved in education ... yet. But I was interested in education ... as opposed to any kind of social work, such as paying calls on sick people, in the hospital. If there was an administrative type of assistance, signing papers to help a cause, I would do that; but I was not interested in dealing with people who were injured or ill. That's why I never became a nurse, or was interested in that field of functioning. Options for young women

today have expanded enormously from what was available for me to pursue.

In my other posts, notably Guatemala, when we reached there at the end of January 1976, and experienced the earthquake at the beginning of February, that hardship allowance which had been terminated at the end of December 1975, was restored for anyone who arrived in 1976. The housing allowance was determined on an individual case-basis, depending upon what you could find for your family size, for your grade. The housing supply after the earthquake was incredible. What was happening was that so many professional offices were so damaged, and the office tenants: doctors, and dentists, were in competition with families for houses that they could use while their office buildings were repaired. They had the clout to get, and the money to pay for whatever housing they wanted. So we were really left with very "poor pickings". That is why we took the house that became available to us when it did; it had been approved by the Embassy engineers, as a safe house to live in. This just happened to be in Zone Nine right near the airport and that's what put me back to watching the 747 coming in my window. And when Sarah had originally mentioned to me that zone nine could be problematic for comfortable living, I finally understood what she meant. We lived in a house in zone ten for about the first eight or ten months, until somebody else was moving, and was taking over another house that another family was leaving; there was an on-going game of "musical houses" for a long time.

We were in ROCAP, the Regional Office of Central America and Panama. The AID Mission ran the bi-lateral program in Guatemala. My husband got to travel frequently on short-term TDYs, because he was working with the entire Central American community. There were organizations of international development in all the countries. We did some travel also, when we could, because distances were very short within Central America. You could ride up a hill in Guatemala City, and you would be on what was known as the road to El Salvador. We did do this a couple of times. We went to the beaches. We never got to Costa Rica, or Nicaragua, but we did go to Copan, in Honduras, to go to the ruins. There were different purposes ... I was not business oriented, it was just a change of pace, change of routine; of cultural interest in these places, and educational tourism, for all of us.

You mentioned something about guards on school buses ... there was no problem with terrorism against us (as American Diplomats) when we lived there. I do remember being cautioned to not establish routines to walk or drive around the city; and at some point, Robert could no longer walk to work in the AID mission which was across the main avenue from the Embassy and a short distance from our house; he had to be driven by an Embassy/AID driver with a guard riding shotgun beside him. This drove me wild when I had to accompany him anywhere under those conditions.

When we finally moved into what finally became available to us as our permanent quarters (in zone 9, after all!) it was a very secure compound, with a guarded gate which was locked closed every night. There were numerous families living in the many quite luxurious homes within this compound, all part of one extended upper-class family that

was historically well known and significant in Guatemala. I did get to know a few of them, but very superficially, and have no lasting contact with any of them. Douglas and the owner's granddaughter were about the same age, and were friendly, as young children can grow to be, but she went to the Colegio Americano, as most of those children did. He was even invited to several parties; and he learned to communicate comfortably in Spanish, with his schoolmates and teammates. He did learn to play soccer; and continued playing when we returned home, in local recreation leagues. He is one American youngster who did not grow up playing any kind of Little League baseball, or softball ... he learned to kick a ball before throwing.

There was also a focus for me as a Foreign Service spouse, when the schools reopened and everything was going well; I had suggested to the President of the Government Wives group, based on something I was involved in way back in Chile, a discussion group. I knew right away that if I were going to propose such a thing I had better be ready, willing and able to be the first one to lead any discussion. Since I was talking to someone I had met in Chile, again an AID spouse, Florene Lusk; we had been friends in Chile, and the Lusks turned out to be assigned in Guatemala, also. When I proposed this discussion group ... this was the year of the Bicentennial ... and for me after having driven through Mexico, having done this 'once in a lifetime trip', and having been welcomed with the earthquake, I was so homesick. I was reading Time, and Newsweek and finding out what I was missing at home in that particular year. I was so unhappy ... I have never been as unhappy away from my own home or place, as I was then. My way of dealing with it, was finding useful activities, that I found interesting. If someone else was interested, fine; if not, it didn't matter. What was helping me, was the activity ... and group contact as a support.

*[Tape 2, first side ends abruptly at this point. Continue on side B Interview seems to begin in mid-conversation]*

*Q: ... Were you involved in the '85 report of the Spouse in the Foreign Service?*

HECHTMAN: I received the questionnaire that came in the mail. And I sat and I read it, and I read it and I cried. I did because ... I didn't set out to marry a foreign service officer. It just sort of happened to ... within the marriage that I started out with, I didn't expect it ... and the adventures that I had, that are my life, had both sides. Some have had some very positive aspects, and I would say the most negative was the earthquake.

But the earthquake turned out to be a real learning experience ... about me, and about us, and about what I could tolerate. In addition, I had gone through SmokeEnders, and learned from what they do (in smoking cessation, or habit breaking) was that the third day, the third week, the third month ... for some reason the number three, the third is the most difficult, or critical, and if you are prepared for a problem, in terms of habit breaking, activities and ways of thinking, that you could deal with that problem. And what happened, I was fine, I stopped smoking, I made it through the third day, I made it through the third week, and do you know what happened in the third month? The



earthquake. And at that point my friend Sarah, with whom we had moved in, was smoking ... obviously ... an awful lot.

I had quit successfully, and this was in my third month (of cessation) and it was really difficult, particularly with her smoking, and with the cigarettes sitting around, this is how I started originally ... my mother smoked, she would leave a pack with three or four cigarettes in the kitchen and take a fresh pack to work with her. When I was in high school, I'd come home and see the three or four cigarettes, and so I would try one. And that's how it started off, when I was in high school. So here I am, with a real fear, and reason to be concerned and want to smoke again, but I know I was able to convince myself that if having a cigarette **now** would do what I needed ... which was to stop the earth from shaking at any old time, intellectually I knew it wouldn't happen, and I would throw away all the good I had accomplished for the last three months. So I resisted ... and I didn't smoke. I haven't smoked in about eighteen years. Something like that. When public service ads appeared on television in around 1973, I remember my son would say: Mommy, mommy don't smoke, it's a matter of life and breath. He to this day, credits himself with having gotten me to quit. Okay, kid, you can take the credit, but I know **I** did it.

*Q: How does that tie in with questionnaire and the Role of the Spouse? You said you cried ... for yourself, or for the foreign service spouse in general?*

HECHTMAN: That's a good question, I think I was crying for myself, because I hadn't planned this. It had happened TO me.

*Q: You were a victim.*

HECHTMAN: That's how I was feeling at that moment. It could have been because of a logical sequence of events; including my mother's death, which occurred at the end of the year in which we returned. I think I was still dealing with that ... If not that ... I cried because of not having had control of what was happening to me. I have succeeded beyond my mother's proudest hopes and dreams for her daughter; I got married, we have a home, she has a grandson, we are a stable family; now she was working on me after a certain amount of time about (having) another. I really got into all kinds of arguments over it, it was none of her business, and she did not have any place in this issue. Where does this fit in with crying about this questionnaire? The sense of family, in terms of the Foreign Service ... I focused in that report, on things that I knew the most about. Which of course was education, and the needs of the children ... my biggest contribution was in the parts that dealt with schooling and children. My name is on the list, under the chairmanship of Penne Laingen, but it was a question of what was important to me, with my family with one child. I wanted him to have the best he could have in education, and what I was seeing was not what I was being favorably impressed with, given what little experience I was having in the Foreign Service. I talked with a lot of friends who have had kids educated overseas in different ways, friends who had a son who went to school in Chile, in a school run under the British system. But again, that was before I was even aware of

what was offered for school children overseas.

*Q: But how did you learn, how did you get involved ?*

HECHTMAN: I guess I called up. I said I'd be interested in assisting in the report and doing whatever had to be done to put this report together. I think I realized from having whatever information was sent with the questionnaire, and the different aspects of the questionnaire ... Some of them totally didn't apply to me, especially the protocol items, the entertainment items ... the diplomatic things ... I really wasn't involved in it and so I wasn't interested, nor could I then participate in dealing with the responses on the reporting aspect of it. I was more interested in the responses that could show what was being found ... responses that dealt with education and the safety of the family in a place that I (or any spouse) had not actually elected to be in. My husband in a sort of way had elected ... but that's not the same as me. The same way as the young man who gave my husband advice about driving from Orlando via Mexico to Guatemala ... he didn't really know what he was talking about ... because he was dealing from a whole different set of perceptions. He was a single young man who did the trip frequently. I'm a mother with a six year old child who hadn't driven that far with a child ... Ever. And so when we did it again, at least I knew a little bit more what to expect. On both trips I remember we could make reservations as soon as we crossed the border, because my husband "trained to anticipate difficulties" wants to have things organized and prepared, whereas I'm a little more relaxed about it and you take what you can get; as long as it's a clean bed and has indoor plumbing ... never mind a shower ... but indoor plumbing at least. We survived both of these trips very nicely.

*Q: Did you find other women who were involved in the Report; which, by the way I think is a very good report, and it's still the best thing we have on spouses. Were there others who felt like you?*

HECHTMAN: Therese Kellermann, (whom I've lost track of now), she and I were both AID spouses; we had similar feelings about our "second-class status". I do remember all of the others who also worked on the Report. I remember meeting at Penne Laingen's house ... sitting around the table; talking about these things. I have never had to deal with evacuations, thank goodness; those are some aspects of the report that didn't apply to me.

Also the other areas of the world, where there are very small missions and posts, which area is growing now (Eastern Europe). Our career has been entirely in Latin America, and entirely with USAID. We're a little more than USIA, in numbers and percentage of the total, but we are nowhere near the percentage of State, obviously. And the age when I did this, I was certainly not as old as I am now. I guess I was in a group that's about the same size as the group I was in then, in terms of the total that responded. The last year of overseas post was '82 and that's also the biggest group, so the experience was closest to our consciousness. I look back at it as an unexpected and unsought for lifestyle, but one that has been enormously satisfying, overall.

There was one unpleasant incident, in Guatemala, where there was a maid who left me after some acrimony about something, and she accused me of something, and called me a nasty name relating to the fact that I'm Jewish. Now how did she know, she knew because we had celebrated a holiday, either having lighted Hanukkah candles, or had a Passover Seder. It was obvious that we are Jews, and that was our life. And she didn't have to be involved in it, but that was us, and for her to curse me out, or call me a dirty Jew, or say anything nasty, I have never in my life, been talked to like that. I was very startled. This was a maid, that I didn't fire, but we were changing maids, and she accused me of stiffing somebody else, another maid who had left because she was sick, I suspected that she had had an illicit abortion; I knew she was bleeding seriously, I was aware of things like that, as a woman.

There are always connections among the level of servants we had to deal with, especially in a small community. The housing and the servants are always an issue. If you can get a good maid, an honest maid, that someone had known, and could recommend as reliable, you could consider yourself lucky. I had another maid, who was so totally unschooled in anything domestic, that I caught her in time before she immersed my electric coffeepot in a basin of water. She used my wooden salad bowl as a dishpan!! I've never forgotten this either. At this time, she had a couple of children, was not really married to the father, but was concerned about her children who she had left with her mother for their safety while she came to work for me. I found her so ignorant, that I agreed to let her go home and check on her children when she asked me. I told her that when she got her situation straightened out, she could come back and I would see what I could do for her, but I didn't think our relationship had any future. Several months later, she contacted me and I was able to put her in touch with a Milgroup spouse, whom I had met through the government spouse organization; the bottom line on this person was that she turned out to be heaven-sent for this military wife. I know that there are a lot of people who prefer to train to their style, a totally ignorant servant, whereas I can't deal with that. I want somebody who at least knows that you don't immerse an electrical appliance in water. I'm too sophisticated in my lifestyle to get back to square one. Which is what was needed for her ... but there are those who prefer that. So whoever the military spouse was, I at least could say that I found her honest and trustworthy. The next time I saw her she was at the house of that military family, and I recognized her immediately; I'm not sure that she recognized me. She was carrying a young baby, they had a new baby, and there were several other children. And the spouse, whose name completely evades me ... it's not important anymore ... thought this girl was wonderful, was very capable and was learning all that she could teach her. So she was no dope ... she did learn a little from me, at least to not immerse electric appliances in water. And she was good with the children, which I knew was important ... honesty and good with the children. I understand that. I was so delighted that this poor girl turned out to be such a wonderful employee. I felt good about that one, too.

*Q: Getting back to the report, did everybody work well together. I really do think that it is the best thing that has ever come out on spouses.*

HECHTMAN: Thank you.

*Q: I just wondered if you worked in little individual groups, or all together as one big happy family?*

HECHTMAN: When we met at Penne's house at Ft. McNair, we met to first decide how to divide the specific responsibilities, then later to pull things together. In the cases of those of us who had certain focuses, particularly on the older spouses, and the protocol, and the entertainment needs, the community spirit ... reading the questionnaire brought up issues that rang all kinds of bells and whistles for me.

The sense of community spirit was important. It had existed in Chile, and this was where I started. When I got to Guatemala, there are things that are beyond anybody's control, or ability to influence. The Ambassador had been transferred and later assassinated, so we didn't have an Ambassador. The DCM's wife was obviously not an American born spouse ... her accent gave her away as being of German background. Which doesn't matter, but I have no common ground with her ... if she was born and raised in Europe, particularly in a German or Austrian society, during or before WWII, something goes off in back of my head that says: 'Be careful'. We got along fine, what little I ever saw of her. We kept whatever relationship we had to a proper protocol level.

In Guatemala what also happened, and this was when I had the most sense of loss ... and that's probably when I joined AAFSW ... was the fact that I didn't have the kind of support that I'd had in Chile. My husband said, we should not compare Guatemala to Chile. That was the best thing he could have said. I had to repeat that to myself a hundred times ... because Guatemala is Guatemala, and Chile is Chile ... and I was able to separate out the beauty and fine qualities of each. Yes, they'd shoot first and ask questions later, in Guatemala ... it still is that way, I believe ... in most of Central America.

I've read the fascinating series of books by John Leavitt Stevens, who went to Central America a long time ago as the Ambassador of the United States to the Country of Central America, in the 1870s ... the adventures he had were brilliantly described ... life there, and what happened on a daily level, and how it took three days on mule-back to travel from Guatemala City to Antigua, before the earthquake that blew the top off the volcano and flooded that earliest capital of the country. It was very, very interesting. That was what sparked my historical curiosity and knowledge of that country's history. I wanted to learn as much as I possibly could about Guatemala as a country. The community of foreign service people ... I didn't really feel myself an enormous part of, because I never had the obligations that the State Department spouses had. In Guatemala, when we didn't have an Ambassador's wife, and we didn't have a ROCAP Director's wife, for one reason or another ... or the ROCAP Director's wife was more interested in pursuing her own activities, and I had to call the wife of the Deputy Director of ROCAP, to take me to call upon the Senior wife at post ... I think that was Helga Andrews who was the DCM's wife, because we still hadn't had a new Ambassador appointed. The number two wife in ROCAP, who should have been responsible for me, wasn't into doing

any of these things. And I at least understood the need for doing those things. Never mind folding down the corner of your calling card ... I remember having all of this orientation and information; but I also looked askance at it, as not being relevant. I took people to call on the senior spouses, and extended a hand to anybody who was a "newcomer", especially if I was the "old timer".

Years ago in Chile, the number three man at post was Sid Weintraub, I don't know if you know that name ... he's here now in Washington, dealing with NAFTA. His wife was a "quintessential Foreign Service spouse" from the old days, and she asked me to help with another new State Department spouse who was about my age, we were very young ... This spouse was scared out of her mind because the Senior spouse was telling her to do various things, such as teach, because she was a teacher; do your part as the spouse for your husband's career. This was something I've never forgotten. For her to say that, was waving a red flag in front of me ... I said if my husband can't hack it in this business he has no business being here, regardless of what I do, unless I do anything illegal or illicit, as long as I don't do anything that would be bad for him in any case. For me to go out and work, or do anything, **because** it's good on **his** record, I was appalled at that thinking. This was a person, who it happens, whose husband grew up in the same building in Brooklyn, that my husband grew up in, because we happen to be Jews, who lived in the same part of Brooklyn; he is a good ten or fifteen years older than we are; but so we understand the background. The thing about a Jewish mother, and a Jewish wife. All the biggest comedians on television know what I'm talking about ... because there is something in the background of our lives which produces some very good comedy, and also some very true but sad and bitter commentary on reality, too. So I had met Gladys back in Chile, when we learned we had much of our background in common. Where we disagreed was on the role of the wife in support of her husband's career, and the status it would provide. But what makes me who I am, is what I am, and what I do, in terms of my concerns about people ... not my status. I guess that's what I'm leading up to.

There was a question of status that was brought up in the questionnaire; and how we felt about it ourselves, and about the life we were leading and how we could deal with it. I have known friends overseas, who have had absolutely nothing to do with "obligations" in terms of the State Department, or the Embassy. They kept to themselves and had friends and did things with their friends because they wanted to, not because the Embassy required it. Again this is something that has filtered down to AID spouses because we haven't had the protocol obligations that State Department people have, and have had. It (status) was not a driving force in my life. Does that explain?

*Q: Mm hmm.*

HECHTMAN: But I understood it. That I understood the protocol, and the need to at least pay a call on the number one (Senior) spouse, and since I had such a positive experience in Chile, I couldn't understand why it wasn't happening in Guatemala. The State Department and Embassy contingent in Guatemala, and we were all serving the same government, so why was this happening? Just because we weren't State Department, we

were only AID? Who the hell are we? (pardon me). I don't think in those terms. This is the way you should be doing things, this is the pattern, and yes, it is politeness and neighborliness, and you should be doing this for your next in line. It was the first time I ever thought in terms of ranking. So I was number three in that mission, (ROCAP), the AID Deputy Director was number two, and I was number three because my husband's position put him there. He was not the Comptroller, but he was in the project and program section. This is the only time I ever talked about rank ... ever. I just haven't been involved in it. It has always been a people to people relationship, within the foreign service. I have never paid a whole lot of attention to the ranking. I know some people are very strong on this ... Whatever works for you ... fine.

*Q: Whatever turns you on.*

HECHTMAN: Exactly. My mother was like that. That was not something that we got along on, that's where we fought most. She tried to teach me, proper things, manners ... but certain things come about by personality and it is the best thing to do, to be a good neighbor, and to help someone who lacks something. I've always been willing to help a neighbor; we live in a multicultural community in McLean, and we get along very well. So now I have a new friend who has just recently moved in, she is a military spouse, she and her children are much younger; but what I find interesting is that they were in Germany for a while, and we have a certain amount of common experience. We are not both from midwestern U.S. homogeneous backgrounds. We have a sense of what life is like on the outside in some other ways.

*Q: One thing occurred to me, I've never been to Chile, but I was briefly in Argentina, and lived in Brazil. Chile must have a middle class, like Argentina has, and you see Guatemala doesn't have that much. In Guatemala you either have the "haves or the have-nots", and there wasn't that nice comfortable layer that you knew in Chile and knew at home, and that makes a big difference.*

HECHTMAN: It does.

*Q: Holland was very easy for me, and Sierra Leone ... forget it, there was no common experience, between the people from "up-country" who came down into government positions while they molded the new country ... and I think that has a lot to do with your unhappiness.*

HECHTMAN: Yes, absolutely. Panama was a little different, because of the Canal; that's a whole other ball game. And we were only there for eighteen months, so I really can't even recall ...

*Q: And that was a "winding down" situation, and those are never good.*

HECHTMAN: Right. And what I was doing at that point in my life, was I went back to school. The University of Oklahoma provided courses for the military to go on in their

educational skills. They offered remedial courses, high school completion courses (GED) for the armed forces, as well as Graduate level programs; and as State Department and AID spouses, we could avail ourselves of these programs, as long as you could qualify. I had my college bachelor's degree. So I went to school again, to work for a Master's degree in Public Administration, because my son was not a baby anymore, he was in upper elementary school. He could take care of himself, as I went back to school. The way that program operated was you read all the materials, and went to class every night for a week. It was very intensive. It was exhausting (as it had been studying language at FSI). We spent all day Saturday and Sunday, every night for a week plus the weekend. What happened to us, then, was an interesting coincidence ... our friends from Guatemala, the Grants, the Bank of America family had been evacuated from Guatemala, because the banks were getting uneasy about their personnel and kidnap threats. When we had left for home leave prior to transfer, we found our old friends had been transferred to Panama during the summer. This was as close as I've ever gotten to that whole issue of evacuation due to threat of terrorism. And though it didn't personally affect us, at least here I had a complete community, people I had worked with for years in Guatemala, and my son has his best friend there, living down the street from where we finally found the apartment that suited us. They had been in Panama two weeks before we got there!

At this point in our lives, since we are children of apartment life, I said I think that this time, I'd rather live in an apartment and have somebody come in every day to clean up, or every other day, I don't need a full time live in maid ... this child is not a baby anymore. There were kids who could babysit, if I needed a sitter, when we were going out; then he finally said he didn't have a problem staying alone by himself, he knew we would come home. We didn't carouse till 2 in the morning, anymore ... ever ... we didn't. That was never a problem. So we lived in an apartment, I felt more independent that way, because there was a need in a house to always have someone there all the time, or you risked having the house robbed. That's what we ended up with ... an apartment in Punta Paitilla. Right next to the end of the runway of the airport where the small planes took off for the San Blas Islands, famous for the Molas made by the Cuna Indians. That's where we went for my birthday that year!!

It was an interesting post, not the most wonderful, but it was beautiful to look out the window on a beautiful sunny morning and watch the boats lining up to transit the Canal. That was interesting. And the other connection here was, that in Guatemala, when I had suggested the matter of the study group which we had had before in Chile, which had been a wonderful thing, and I worked with a friend of mine on a subject which had to do with the time abortion was legalized ... I think that was when Roe vs Wade made abortion legitimate in the U.S. We did a report on this and the back and forth on it ... a woman's right to choose. That's what the whole issue was. I have always been in favor of a woman's right. It's not a religious issue ... it's a question of a woman's right ... for whatever reason.

At that particular point, in Guatemala, we were talking about the Canal, the negotiations that were going on ... I was willing to talk about the Canal, for one reason or another we

have long been associated with Guatemala and Panama; the need for the U.S. to keep it, or not to keep it ... Why do we need this thing anymore? It's no longer as important as it once was, because most of the big tankers, can't fit in it. So these were things that interested me, that impinged upon our life, and what my husband was involved in.

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### BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Robert Hechtman

Spouse's Position: Program, Population

Spouse Entered Service: AID; 11/65

Left Service: 9/30/93

You Entered Service: Same

Left Service:

Status: Spouse of retiree

Posts:

1964-65	Washington, DC
1966-70	Santiago, Chile
1971-75	Washington, DC
1976-80	Guatemala City, Guatemala
1980-82	Panama City, Panama
1982-present	Washington, DC

Place/Date of birth: December 24, 1941; Brooklyn, NY

Malden Name: Phyllis E. Lippman

Schools (Prep, University): BA, Health & Physical Education, Brooklyn College;  
Publications Specialist Certificate, George Washington University, 1989

Profession: Teacher (Health & Physical Education); Editor Proofreader 1964-65; 1989-91

Date/Place of Marriage: June 22, 1964; Brooklyn, New York

Children:

Douglas Marc Hechtman, b. 1/27/70, Santiago, Chile

Positions held (Please specify Volunteer or Paid):

A. At Post: President, PTA, Colegio Maya, Guatemala City, 1979-80

B. In Washington, DC: Contributor, Report on the Role of the Spouse in the Foreign Service, 1985



*End of interview*