

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
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Foreign Service Spouse Series

**LAURA JOHNSON SMITH**

*Interviewed By: Pamela Gordon Burdick  
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**INTERVIEW**

*Q: It is February 22nd. Pamela Gordon Burdick interviewing Laura Johnson Smith. Mrs. Harry Smith. Mrs. Smith, whom I shall call either Laura or Aunt Laura and probably slip back and forth is Aunt Laura because she is a lifelong friend of my mother's, has known me all of my life, has always been there from Washington to Athens to giving me a*

*coming out luncheon many years ago when she was my mother's matron of honor and my mother was a bridesmaid in her wedding therefore it's a longstanding and very close relationship. Now we'll start out with Aunt Laura. My first question on the list here and as I have said we can be tangential, ancillary, and anecdotal as you like.*

*What do you think makes a good foreign service wife?*

SMITH: Well, I think a good foreign service wife must have a unique education, that is she must have a desire to learn about foreign things and not be a person who is only interested in the things that are surrounding her now that she must have an idea about world affairs and that she must have a good physical strength and ability to withstand unhealthful places that take a different way of life.

*Q: Was Uncle Harry already in the foreign service when you married him?*

SMITH: No, he worked for the treasury department until the war and then in 1948 there was an opening in the foreign service where they gave an examination for the appointment to the foreign service for 18 men in the upper echelon and he was appointed in 1948 in April or May. We were ordered to China because they had to close the international court and he was an attorney. They wanted an attorney to close the international court in Shanghai.

*Q: So you didn't marry into it.*

SMITH: No, but I knew that he had prepared all of his life for the foreign service but didn't get the opportunity to go into the foreign service when he was a young man because they didn't give the examination when he finished foreign service school at Georgetown University.

*Q: How old were the boys?*

SMITH: When we went into the foreign service? Well this is in the State Department, which is quite different from the foreign service which he had at the end of the war as military attaché to Chile in 44 and 45. We were in Chile, he was military attaché and assistant military attaché and acting military attaché in Chile. They were 6 months old when we began living abroad, however, when we went to China in 48 they were, let's see how is your mathematics?

*Q: Rotten*

SMITH: They were preschool.

*Q: I suppose the thrust of my point is that you didn't marry with the idea necessarily of those years abroad.*

SMITH: No we did not. He was Chief Procurement Officer/Chief Planning Officer for

the United States Treasury of GSA.

*Q: Now, you met my mother ... Well, Mummy said that you first met largely because A) you quickly became good friends because you had been to school in England.*

SMITH: Yes, my father had won a Guggenheim fellowship to study in London and Vienna in 1924 and I spent 3 years in an English boarding school at that time.

*Q: So the idea of going abroad even though you graduated from National Cathedral and all the rest was not like leaving Dubuque and heading for the hinterlands.*

SMITH: No, no, no. I knew that my husband was very interest in going abroad anyway. When he proposed, actually, he said now when we get enough money I want to retire and we go live in the Balearic Islands so I had to look that up.

*Q: It's in Spain isn't it?*

SMITH: Yes, it's in the Mediterranean

*Q: I did it. I had to think about that for a moment. Do you feel, as I do, and we were discussing this at tea, that the foreign service really is a team job?*

SMITH: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely a team job I think that a foreign service officer needs a wife who will cooperate in every way with the things he wants to do in the foreign country. Whether he is a political officer, an economic officer, or a consul. Whatever he does she should be able to cooperate and it's not just in entertainment it's in making friends and entering into the cultural life of the foreign country.

*Q: In terms of the 24-hour a day high profile high visibility how do you manage what, I know your sons were very nice boys, but they must have done something naughty and you thought Oh my God and it is so much more high profile for children overseas than it would be if they did something naughty in Chevy Chase.*

SMITH: Well I suppose so. Of course being a very proud mother I never would admit that they

*Q: ALRIGHT! Didn't your dog ever bite anyone*

SMITH: No, my dog never bit anyone either. But, the children were put in the schools where we were stationed and they just became part of the normal life and we tried to become part of the normal life of the community. And while we had a high profile I presume we had a high profile because we had a status which we wouldn't get as a tourist or we wouldn't get even as the wife of an American corporation representative. We were able to meet ministers but of course I had to run a house with servants so I had the whole gambit and everyone in the foreign service has that. They meet everyone just like you do in America.

*Q: I find that I meet fewer people in this country than I did overseas.*

SMITH: Yes, well this is true after you retire particularly.

*Q: Well there's a difference between the pace of life. There's more time to talk to people overseas because of servants on the other hand there is more work sometimes because of servants than less.*

SMITH: This is true especially as in Chile the cook would take a knife to the upstairs maid and try to murder her in the kitchen you would have to kind of step between them sometimes but this is something we don't have because we don't have a cook or the upstairs maid.

*Q: Just so long as it doesn't happen between the soup course and the fish course when you're having people for lunch.*

SMITH: That's right.

*Q: Save it until tea*

SMITH: Save it until afterwards

*Q: I remember, and I am wandering over the map here a little, some of my problems were difficult times or times that I found difficult politically to defend for instance in the 1971 Bangladesh war between India and Pakistan I thought that our Government's tilt toward Pakistan was unforgivable. That was one of those times when I had to smile and shut up. Did you have similar times?*

SMITH: I think that's quite true I think you do have to defend your country and their policy. You are not in a policy making job you're in a job to carry out the policies not to make the policies.

*Q: Not to make the policies but was there never a time when you felt there was something that was indefensible from your point of view and you just had to shut up rather than to stand on a soap box and defend it?*

SMITH: Well this I suppose happened in Greece more, well also in Iraq too because after we left they murdered the King. But, I don't feel that I am capable of making the policy decision. I'm not in on what the decision is based on and therefore I believe that if you have confidence in your country that you will tend to defend the country and their way of believing in it and their way of handling it and do as you are told. I don't think that you have a right to an independent judgment on that.

*Q: I don't think you have the right to announce an independent judgment.*

SMITH: Yes, you are right. You can have an independent judgment I'm sure.

*Q: But you don't have the right to shout about it.*

SMITH: You don't have a right to shout about it and you don't have a right to think about it too much because if you do you may not be able to control your feelings. We were fortunately in countries that didn't collapse until after we left.

*Q: Does this say something about your tours of service?*

SMITH: Absolutely, absolutely, I think my husband ...

*Q: Typhoid Mary*

SMITH: Either that or he carried it until we left.

*Q: There is that yes.*

SMITH: Because many times a diplomat can put out a fire without the fire being ever apparent.

*Q: I think that if you have a close enough relationship with, I'll call the host country nationals that probably those host country nationals aren't going to prod you overly, i.e., my Indian friends had the exquisite tact never to say what in heaven's name is your country doing about Bangladesh. That was a subject tacitly avoided, tactfully and tacitly avoided.*

SMITH: Usually the crossing of swords that I had was not on a political basis but was more on a religious or a moral basis. The Arabic countries they were willing to point them out and I was not willing to argue about it.

*Q: That's one I wouldn't touch with a barge pole. There were a few flaws that could have been pointed back I should think.*

SMITH: But, I wouldn't do it.

*Q: No of course not.*

SMITH: And I don't think it was up to me to defend the Christian religion or any other religion or to criticize their religion.

*Q: No, I certainly agree with that. How did you feel, now let's see when did Uncle Harry leave foreign service?*

SMITH: '56 he retired.

*Q: And you had been in China*

SMITH: And in Baghdad and in Greece. We had three posts.

*Q: I remember when we came to visit you in Greece in 1952.*

SMITH: Do you remember that?

*Q: Yes! and you met me up in Piraeus and you had a lovely house.*

SMITH: And Harry wasn't there he was called back to the United States on a mission so that we unfortunately couldn't entertain in the way we would have liked to. But your ship was only there for 2 or 3 days.

*Q: You entertained beautifully I remember. You gave us a 5-star tour.*

SMITH: Well I love Greece. I love the antiquities of Greece and living in Greece and we lived in Capicia, which is half way between Athens and Tatoi where the King and Queen lived. It was a delightful place. It was half way up the Pentelicus mountain where the marble came from.

*Q: The open marble?*

SMITH: Yes, all the marble came from the Penteli quarry for the Parthenon.

*Q: I didn't realize that.*

SMITH: The great quarries are there still

*Q: Still producing marble?*

SMITH: They don't mine it anymore.

*Q: It's been done.*

SMITH: It's been done, yes. But the people love it, in the spring it is covered with wild flowers cymbidiums and tulips oh it's a beautiful place to be.

*Q: Oh it must be lovely.*

SMITH: It's a lovely place.

*Q: If you were doing those countries again, China and Greece and Iraq.*

SMITH: Oh and we were in Hong Kong.

*Q: Oh what a terrible thing to forget.*

SMITH: Oh it was the light our life.

*Q: Absolutely.*

SMITH: It was a marvelous stay in Hong Kong we enjoyed that thoroughly. But Harry was evacuated. After being a year under the communists in Shanghai he was evacuated down to Hong Kong and then I went out from the United States to Hong Kong because I hadn't been allowed to stay in Shanghai in '48 when the communists came into Shanghai.

*Q: If you were doing all of that period again. Say at 5 times the salary for Texaco or I don't know what corporate thing would you rather have the foreign service?*

SMITH: Oh yes. Oh no doubt about it. To me the foreign service was a delight and I enjoyed it very much and it was just the thing I like to do and I don't even like going back as a tourist I like to keep my memories of being a foreign service wife and contributing to the foreign service.

*Q: But if you had been able to go say Hong Kong or Shanghai as a highly paid executive's wife what is it that appeals to you about the foreign service experience as opposed to ...*

SMITH: Well I think the fact that you have an entree for instance in Greece we were invited to a dance at the palace which we would never have been invited to had we been representing a large corporation and Harry and I enjoy dancing and we were dancing together when two young very handsome young men came up and said the Queen would like to dance with Mr. Smith.

*Q: Wow!*

SMITH: Wow!

*Q: What did Mr. Smith say?*

SMITH: Mr. Smith was flabbergasted. He was delighted so the one young man stayed and talked to me. He didn't dance.

*Q: He didn't dance?*

SMITH: He didn't dance with me.

*Q: Rats*

SMITH: But he stayed with me. It seems that King Paul didn't like to dance and Queen Frederika loved to dance and she had picked out my husband as the man that she wanted

to dance with.

*Q: That's wonderful*

SMITH: After the dance the King came over to talk to me and our ambassador had been trying to talk to the King for a long time. He was there but the King was talking to us and not to the ambassador.

*Q: Handsomely done. Trust you Aunt Laura. The least the King could do was talk to you.*

SMITH: The King came over to talk to me and we had a very nice discussion.

*Q: Where was Uncle Harry? He was still off. . .*

SMITH: No, he and the Queen came and joined us.

*Q: Well I'm glad to hear that. Your ambassador must have been very ticked off.*

SMITH: Oh absolutely he was furious, he was furious.

*Q: Is his name mentionable or not or don't if you don't ...*

SMITH: He's no longer alive so I don't think we should.

*Q: Don't bother.*

SMITH: No but you can see how much we enjoyed it because we just entered into everything that was going on in the countries where we were.

*Q: Have' of your boys done overseas service or . . .*

SMITH: Yes, the older one has not. He is very much American. He has an MBA from Wharton and he likes to manage corporations and bring them up to snuff and sell them. That's his job. The younger one worked for Bell Laboratories for 20 years and IT&T, perhaps you've seen it in the newspapers lately, IT&T brought him in to manage their overseas laboratories he spent 3 years with them and lived in Brussels. He just came back a couple of months ago and is just getting back into the American way of life.

*Q: The thrust of my question there was exactly what you say about entering into the overseas life is certainly something that my husband and I did and I think that I got that from my parents who entered in exactly as you and Uncle Harry entered in and yet so many Americans .*

SMITH: But you were with the Government and therefore or with an arm of the Government which could have this wonderful relationship but you can't as a corporation



executive you never have the entrée.

*Q: You don't have the entrée but also there are people who are with the government who don't get anywhere with it unless they have this enthusiasm for what they are doing.*

SMITH: That's true. That's true. And I think it has a lot to do with the wife; I really do. I don't think that all wives enjoyed it as much as I did.

*Q: Well, I loved it but I think that was because I was trained by people like you and my mother from before I knew what it was all about and I think it adds immense quality and depth.*

SMITH: Well you do have to have an inquiring mind too. That's part of your first question I guess, what it means to be a good foreign service wife. You have to have an inquiring mind, a mind that is interested in other people and the way other people live. Peoples I suppose we should say.

*Q: Whichever. I asked my mother the same question. She said A) enthusiasm and B) adaptability.*

SMITH: She's right. I think you have to have also a constitution. You have to have a strong constitution. You have to have one that would be able to, would not get ill at the sight of a poor starving child. A constitution that can stand up, not necessarily robust physically but a good strong stomach.

*Q: That I know. One that can bite into a sheep's liver or a camel's liver that is raw will stand you in good stead.*

SMITH: I swallowed 15 eyes of a sheep one night.

*Q: Fifteen! Must have been of at least 7 sheep.*

SMITH: They killed I think for a full consul they have a certain ritual, the Sheiks in Iraq, have a certain number I think they killed 30 sheep because of my husband's rank. He got half the eyes and he couldn't swallow them.

*Q: Thank God you weren't Mrs. Kissinger.*

SMITH: I sat behind him and I swallowed every one of them.

*Q: I am devastated because now I know the small worth of my spouse, he only got one sheep's eye and I had to swallow it.*

SMITH: He couldn't swallow it either.

*Q: He passed it along to me with a flowery little speech about how we Americans honor*

*our wives and I looked at him and thought okay Burdick you are dead. But he only got one sheep's eye you got 15 that is 7 1/2 sheep.*

SMITH: Boy isn't that awful.

*Q: That is ghastly.*

SMITH: Well all I could do was think these are delicious oysters and then it was no problem.

*Q: I suppose after you've done the first one it's easier. But I am really very put down. I got one sheep's eye.*

SMITH: Now you are sorry you didn't get 15?

*Q: No, but I am just a little humbled that's all. How did you manage, I think no matter what community you live in whether it is in the US or overseas you do have to have some community involvement. You have to be a Brownie leader or a Cub Scout Mother or something.*

SMITH: Yes like a Den Mother.

*Q: Well you had sons. I've done my stint as a Brownie leader and I've done my stint with the various ladies international bazaars and so on and so forth. How did you juggle your own interests and what I think are just necessary involvements with the community in which you are.*

SMITH: I don't know. I suppose it is just fortunate that I didn't have any conflict of interest. I can play bridge or I cannot play bridge, I can go dancing or not go dancing, I can put on a Red Cross cap and fold bandages until who'll last the longest I've done it. I did it before the war here in the United States I folded bandage and I can do it with the Red Crescent. I can do whatever it doesn't bother me.

*Q: Did you have any particular area that interested you? In the sense that whenever I knew we arrived at a Post and I would look around and know that I had to do something I would always head for the libraries because they interested me more than anything else.*

SMITH: Than anything else. Well I'm not as ...

*Q: Well it was just my own thing that I was trying to do before I got co-opted into something at which I might be less good.*

SMITH: Well I'm not bookishly inclined so therefore I will just take on anything. Let me see what I had in mind, oh yes the thing I enjoyed most along that line was joining a club in Iraq of the foreign-born wives of Iraqis. They had never had an American join this because at that particular time there had never been an American that had not, in

Baghdad, been an American wife of an Iraqi while we were there. Ali Nasa's wife, who was an American, had joined the group but I was invited to join and I don't know why because they probably decided that they liked the feistiness of a small person I suppose besides they could all look down on me and it was fine.

*Q: They would like that in both of us.*

SMITH: I enjoyed that as much as I've enjoyed anything else because we met in their homes and I got a view of the life the German wife, the Swiss wife, the British wife of Iraqi men and how they had adapted to living in Iraq and it was a fascinating club to me.

*Q: You probably learned more about Iraqi life that way than most of the other women.*

SMITH: That way yes and I ate the Iraqi food. I ate ghee, I ate cakes baked with ghee, which I enjoyed.

*Q: Oh I love ghee.*

SMITH: I've heard American's say I'd never eat that stuff and it was delicious.

*Q: I think it probably was. Who was your Iraqi husband?*

SMITH: Look it's snowing.

*Q: It's snowing!? Oh my word is it snowing heavily?*

SMITH: Well you'll have to spend the night with us.

*Q: That leads us right into representational entertaining. I feel, I insist, on putting in my own \*\*\* here at every possible opportunity, the people who say that they won't do representational entertaining unless they are absolutely forced to are missing so much.*

SMITH: Well they don't know how to do it. They don't know how to entertain on a shoestring because the representational allowance is never enough to cover it, to cover the cost of the parties. You have to give of your own. I have made sandwiches until they came out of my ears when we were having a cocktail party and I showed the servants shortcuts, ways to stretch a piece of meat or whatever in order to be able to afford to give a large party for instance.

*Q: I understand that and I agree with it. I know that we never had any allowances.*

SMITH: Now, your mother really she was much better than I ever was at entertaining and she could really make everything just look perfectly beautiful and it wouldn't cost a leg and an arm too.

*Q: But even if it did cost a leg and an arm I still think it's worth it if you are sent overseas*

*and if you're given a big house and you're given education allowances for your children.*

SMITH: Then you dip into your savings if necessary.

*Q: And you don't sit back on your differential allowances and put it in the bank.*

SMITH: Oh heavens that would be a dreadful thing to do.

*Q: Well a lot of people now-a-days are doing that. People are lining up to go to Beijing because it's got a 25% differential and then sitting on it.*

SMITH: Well my husband took time and a half for his hardship post for a time and we didn't take extra money because he wanted to retire early. That's why he retired in 1956, he intended to retire early.

*Q: Don't you think that quite aside from the image projected that the rewards of representational entertaining, sometimes it's a pain to give a cocktail party but those evenings you spend, I found evenings spent with Tanzanians or Napolis or Indians just around the dinner table were twice as much as any amount of office time.*

SMITH: Oh yes, yes that's true, that's quite true. When you relax and everybody's having a fun time that's when you really do learn more than you would ordinarily learn about the people in a country.

*Q: And when you make friendships that are not based on office appointments.*

SMITH: That's right. Friendships that somebody's not trying to get something out of you.

*Q: Well again I'm being tendentious where I feel the service is losing a lot by not insisting on a measure of representational entertaining.*

SMITH: Well perhaps they should do as they did with me 1 when after my husband had passed the foreign service examinations they said they wanted to see his wife before they gave him an appointment and I had to go down and have tea in the State Department.

*Q: Were you scared?*

SMITH: Scared to death.

*Q: What did you do?*

SMITH: All they did was we had a delightful tea and some very interesting men came over and talked to me and that's all it was. It wasn't a written examination at all. But they were trying to find out whether I would enjoy it and whether I was capable of carrying off a conversation.

*Q: It was very nice that they provided interesting attractive men to come and talk to you rather than dreadful ladies or something or other. Tell me about bringing up the children. You were saying at tea time you always sent the children to mobile schools and then you put them through the Calvert System.*

SMITH: Yes, when they were missing something that I thought I couldn't give them or their school wasn't giving them. Now, I think that they got more education that way than they would have gotten had they been in American schools because they were being educated all the time. They played that's true but their friends were the children of the country.

*Q: Would you mind recounting the story*

[The audio got very faint here and then there was nothing else. Second side starts here]

SMITH: School. School was run by Lebanese, Christian Lebanese so it wasn't a public school but it was a school where children went that wanted to-it was a very good school like St. All, like

*Q: St. Albans east?*

SMITH: Yes, anyway they learned Arabic and they did their \*\*\*\*\* in a book just like the Iraqis. They could read and write Arabic and when the USIA library was burned we happened to be in the center of Baghdad. We lived outside of Baghdad so I had to drive the car around the center of Baghdad all the way out to Al-Hillah where we lived and we ran the gauntlet where the car in front of us had been overturned by these revolutionaries who were burning the library and they came up to me and said something to me in Arabic, which I didn't understand, but the children answered him one after the other. So, they laughed at the children and rubbed their heads because they were two little blond boys and motioned us on we didn't have any trouble, but I gathered that a number of cars were turned over and burned and some of the people were hurt.

*Q: The moral of that is carry your own translators at all times.*

SMITH: It is a good thing to be enough a part of the country to be accepted.

*Q: Do you have any off the top of your head favorite memories of their growing up abroad.*

SMITH: Well my really favorite one is also from Iraq and had to do with this visit we made to the Sheik, the Paramount Sheik outside of Baghdad who invited us to the sheep round up. They had 5,000 sheep.

*Q: Hare sheep! That's 10,000 sheep's eyes.*

SMITH: Anyway, they only killed 15 sheep. Anyway, we were the only foreigners

invited to this round up. I told my boys go play with the other children. I couldn't go talk to the wives because the wives spoke Arabic and I didn't speak Arabic that well so I stayed with the men.

*Q: This is a recurring theme here that I admire immensely.*

SMITH: Anyway, the children went and the next thing I heard was the Paramount Sheik came over and said Mrs. Smith I'd like to congratulate you on having two very fine sons, I said thank you. I thought that it was just natural for him to say that. It seems what happened was that the sheepdogs had smelled the difference between my children and the Bedouin children and had decided to cut them off just like they would cut out the wolves.

*Q: Oh, how wonderful.*

SMITH: And they cut them out and the sheepdogs just surrounded the children and the two boys stood in the middle of this circle.

*Q: How old were they?*

SMITH: They were 10 and 12. And the oldest boy luckily was not afraid so he told his brother to stand at his back, the two of them stood back to back and he said now we are going to walk over to where there are some stones and we will go down together and you pick up a stone and I pick up a stone. About that time they called the dogs off.

*Q: I imagine that they were greatly admired. Well of course they were.*

SMITH: They were. They said this was the finest display of courage in children that age they had ever seen.

*Q: Yes, I would have been standing tall as any proud mama.*

SMITH: Yes and their mother was.

*Q: We talked about education. Jewel and I were talking about the strange bonds that foreign service life makes I haven't seen you now for years and years and years and yet you have always been a part of my life and I have other friends that I haven't seen for years, close friends I've had at some posts but I've kind of cleaned them out like a cotton dress. Others whom I haven't seen for years.*

SMITH: You pick up right where you left off.

*Q: What is it?*

SMITH: I don't know, I think it's a rapport that people have like your mother and I have for each other. We may not see each other until we die but we'll always remember the wonderful times we had together as girls.

*Q: Off the subject for a moment. Well of long friendships when I was talking to Mummy the other night she said -- I was nibbling little bits of shrimp on cracker or something -- and she said that plate, it's an octagonal Chinese plate that I have always rather coveted and she said that was a wedding present from Laura and Harry. Do you remember that?*

SMITH: Oh for heaven sakes. No.

*Q: I've been looking at that plate with envious eyes for years.*

SMITH: I can show you what your mother gave us.

*Q: Well I'll have to check that one out. But I'm just always curious about this thing friendships because the friendships that do become close in the foreign service I think are so because they've been forged in small communities or hard times.*

SMITH: Yes you have a feeling for people that you never, never develop for strangers or people that you don't get to know under hardship conditions.

*Q: That doesn't happen in Chevy Chase.*

SMITH: Well It could.

*Q: Well that depends on how hard Chevy Chase gets. You already talked about the cook taking a knife to the upstairs maid. What other servant experiences are juicy or sad or memorable or ghastly spring to mind.*

SMITH: I don't really know. Except that I remember one time in Iraq we had an Armenian maid that put so much starch in the napkins that the night I had the Ambassador for dinner we couldn't unfold the napkins.

*Q: NO! What did you do!?*

SMITH: I just suggested that everyone tear them apart, you could hear it all over the place.

*Q: How marvelous. You said of course the boys spoke all the languages and you learned Spanish.*

SMITH: Kitchen Spanish, yes.

*Q: I found Spanish easiest to learn because it was the only country we were ever in where I was really plunged into it. In India and Nepal you didn't have to most of the Indians I knew spoke better English than I do.*

SMITH: But in Haiti you learned French.

*Q: Well I had French, but I learned it better. Did you find that by and large wives learned languages or made the effort to learn languages.*

SMITH: I don't know really, I just spoke English with them, I didn't ask them what they were doing in their cultural enhancement.

*Q: Very discreet.*

SMITH: We had in Greece an American club and I enjoyed talking to the Americans when we went once a month. I was chairman of the membership committee, which was good because that way I could meet all the Americans and ask them why or why not, why didn't they belong to the club.

*Q: I wonder what their answers were why or why not.*

SMITH: Well, most of the answers were that they didn't have time, that they didn't want to belong.

*Q: Now terrorism and evacuation are new issues it is said but they're not, they are as old as the hills.*

SMITH: They have been there ever since we were in the foreign service. They were there but I think they are worse now.

*Q: I think they are. But you had that incredible-you were sent out of Shanghai.*

SMITH: Yes I was evacuated and the reason I was evacuated was because I had small children. If I had not had small children I would have stayed. They gave the wives a choice if they wanted to stay and wanted to work the consulate they could, if they didn't they could go home. They wouldn't let me stay and I tried to argue them into staying. I wanted very much to stay and I didn't have a fear of staying, which I would have now. I think it is much more dangerous now because the United States is not held with the reverence that it used to be held.

*Q: I thinks it's not only a question of reverence but just this epidemic of terrorism.*

SMITH: Yes and fear. Well, maybe reverence is a wrong word-Fear I suppose.

*Q: Everybody needs to be afraid.*

SMITH: But people in those days liked the United States.

*Q: That's a desolate statement.*

SMITH: But it's true.



*Q: No, it is true.*

SMITH: The reason I can say that now is we've been, my husband is also retired from the military and we take the space available trips abroad quite frequently and we have run into a great many hate incidents now. Many more than we used to.

*Q: I have a feeling that the world is just becoming more hateful for everyone.*

SMITH: That could be, you may be right.

*Q: I mean when an Air India plane is dashed into the Irish Sea this has almost been a good thing because it is the first time the Indians have sat up and said something against terrorism. I also worry that this is turning all sorts of diplomatic missions back into themselves. The security measures now are so stringent.*

SMITH: Yes, It's just awful to go into an embassy now and consulate and to see you have to practically be frisked and your pocketbook they go through. It's not very comfortable.

*Q: It becomes more and more difficult for people who don't know what it used to be like to go out and take a walk at night without being afraid.*

SMITH: Yes that's true. Well of course here in America it's changed. We used to, as girls, go down to F Street and not think a thing about it, your mother and I used to stroll along up F Street as long as we wanted to in the afternoons, late afternoons, we would go to a late movie and then stroll home, stopping at Reeves for a Sundae or something, but we wouldn't do it now.

*Q: No I suppose you wouldn't.*

SMITH: Maybe because we're so old.

*Q: Oh stop. You wouldn't be being representational then I think of let's say Mr. and Mrs. Jones going out for a first posting and all they can do is get frisked when they go into the embassy and they go to the commissary and then they go back to their houses and lock themselves inside the gates and turn on the alarm. This is no way to live, I mean you might as well stroll on F street for pity sakes.*

SMITH: Yes that's true. Quite different from the way, my remembrances then are very much out of date they are not the modern things at all and I've seen the modern embassy and I've seen what they do in order for anybody to make a visit to the Ambassador is a chore.

*Q: You practically have to have a blood test to get in.*

SMITH: Absolutely.

*Q: What trips do you particularly remember-rips, safaris, treks? What were some of the wild ones?*

SMITH: Well of course in Greece we took a sloop through the Greek Islands with another couple. He was a Lieutenant Commander in the Greek Navy and the two couples hired a sloop and we sailed it.

*Q: How lovely.*

SMITH: It was delightful and we saw all the beautiful islands and went around them. One very interesting thing happened, we got to Skiathos and we docked. It was a nice little harbor in there and some old man walking with a cane, he must have been 85 at least, came down and wanted to know if there were any Americans aboard. He noticed the American flag at the stern of the ship, it wasn't a ship it was a boat, and we said well yes there were a couple and so he said come up and have a ouzo with me, I used to live in the United States. Well Harry and I thought that would be fun so we went halfway up the little hill back of the harbor and he began showing us pictures of where he had lived. Well he had lived in Greenville, Mississippi where my father had been his doctor. All sorts of things happen to you in the foreign service, they really do.

*Q: Oh no! That is extraordinary. Well things sort of filter down.*

SMITH: Well some people are lucky and they have these things happen to them and they are out to find anything that they can to have a rapport.

*Q: That is what we have been talking about in essence throughout all of this that wouldn't have happened if you and Harry hadn't been enthusiastic enough to get off the boat and have the ouzo. Some people would have said well thank you very much that's ...*

SMITH: Well we didn't, we had to see what his house looked like. Here was a man that had earned his money in the United States and had taken it back from the United States and brought it back so that he could live almost like a very rich man in Skiathos.

*Q: I think that is amazing. What was he doing in Greenville, Mississippi.*

SMITH: He said that what he had done was take the Greek grapes and he was trying to grow grapes in Mississippi to have a grape arbor in Mississippi, to grow grapes commercially. Of course he didn't know that the climate was that bad.

*Q: Well my admiration for you is redoubled, anyone that can say Greek grapes grown in Greenville without tripping over it.*

SMITH: I think I did trip over it.

*Q: I don't think you did. I heard you sail right through it. When you came back to*

*Washington, I know you wanted to and you planned to so you presumably, and you considered Washington in some sense as your home.*

SMITH: My youngest son was very young when he finished High School and we knew that he was going to college at 14 and we knew we were not going to let him be alone in a college in the United States by himself at the age of 13. So, we were going to be back here with him, we had to be back here with him, and he didn't want to take any other schooling, he wanted to go to college because he said that he wanted to have his Ph.D. by the time he was 21 and he had his mind set on that. So we decided that we better come back and we did, Harry got an assignment in the State Department and then he retired in '56. So that we would be here and be able to follow this kid where he went to school. We just weren't going to let him alone.

*Q: After that were you ever sorry that, not sorry that you'd done that at that time, but that you didn't go out again?*

SMITH: No, we've had a wonderful life since '56 Harry retired and in '59 we opened our own business. We became stockbrokers. We became an over-the-counter house. My husband and his brother and I were incorporators and we incorporated the H L Smith Company. I was the back office and I did all the record keeping and my husband did the research and his brother did the sales so it was a wonderful operation and we were in that business for 25, 30 years almost and we sold it.

*Q: So the foreign service was its own era.*

SMITH: Well, working in the Treasury Department was one, then the Foreign Service, and then the stockbrokerage business. We've had three careers so far and now we are starting on our fourth.

*Q: Which is?*

SMITH: Which is investment advising. Harry is a trustee on 30 trusts. So I'm doing the bookkeeping and he is doing the investing for the trusts so that we keep busy all the time. We are never without something to do.

*Q: My word. I'm going to let you go in a minute. I think what I feel I admire most, I've always dislike so many wives who always seem bemoaning the last post. The place they are whether it's in Korea or in a geographical place is never right but oh you should have been with us in South Africa or Malta you know perfectly well that when they were in South Africa or Malta they were grouching and it strikes me that you appear to have given every single era and every single place all of your enthusiasm.*

SMITH: I think that I wouldn't have liked to do anything that I didn't enjoy.

*Q: But I don't think you would have enjoyed it as much if you hadn't worked on being enthusiastic about it.*

SMITH: Absolutely, one does have to work on that.

*Q: I love that and I find that more a rarer and rarer quality. I may get back to you at some point, but I'm going to let you go for now.*

SMITH: I hope this snow isn't going to throw you. What are you going to do. I've got some rubbers you can ...

*Q: No, no I don't need some rubbers, thank you dear.*

SMITH: Your feet will get

*Q: I'm not walking home.*

*End of interview*