

Opinion

In the last two years there has been a resurgence of interest among Foreign Service women in current issues that affect our families and the Foreign Service itself. The Forum Committee has swelled from a discouraging few to a couple of dozen eager, dedicated, articulate women of mixed ages and viewpoints.

There is a feeling of accomplishment through facing problems realistically and evaluating difficult experiences. Already this cooperative effort has made us aware of the importance of communicating better with each other. We realize how much we need one another, not just while living in the same community abroad, but also here at home under more normal circumstances. Especially we realize how important it is to help others during an evacuation, a hostage-taking or other stressful situation. Divorced Foreign Service women have had a support group for a few years and some foreign-born wives are beginning to meet together. There has been an interest in reviving the old neighborhood welcoming groups, but it is impossible to arrange these here due to the restrictions of the Privacy Act.

Over the years Foreign Service women have helped to establish the Family Liaison Office, additional workshops at the Overseas Briefing Center, assistance for divorced wives, and have spearheaded other reforms and benefits on behalf of everyone. We have held seminars on career planning, youth in transition, legal aspects, mental health, raising children overseas, and managing families in separation. As soon as one problem is taken care of, new expectations (or old hidden ones) arise. We're a busy bunch.

My husband's retirement gives me the advantage of perspective. I am now a Foreign Service mother and aware that the world has changed and the Foreign Service with it. New attitudes and advantages also bring new opportunities. Everyone with Foreign Service experience has something to offer. There is a place in the AAFSW for anyone who wants to share, to learn, to let off steam, or just to enjoy each other's company. It makes me proud to work with such stimulating, intelligent women and to sense that among this sisterhood there is a feeling of caring about the Foreign Service and of belonging to one large, fascinating, dispersed family.

Mary Louise Weiss

Mary Louise Weiss is chairperson of the AAFSW Writers' Group. For more information about membership in this stimulating group, call her at 528-6065.

Where Are You From?

by Maggy Morse

This is a question most Americans ask each other and answer without thinking twice. Almost everyone answers it by naming someplace in the United States.

Yet some Americans cannot answer that question automatically. They have to think. Usually they come up with some explanation as to where they consider their home to be in the United States. Then they tell you where they really are from—where they were born, grew up, went to school, started a career—and where their family of origin still remains. This is the country they left to follow the man or woman they love. Many of these foreign-born spouses became Americans, by choice or otherwise, but all help represent the "American way of life" to the rest of the world.

How is it to become an American or live the "American way," rear your children as Americans, and represent the United States overseas when your roots are elsewhere?

Initiated by the AAFSW Forum Committee, a group of foreign-born and American-born spouses have been meeting to explore these questions. They are trying to determine what kind of support would make the transition easier.

An obvious first step has been the establishment of a support network of volunteers throughout the metropolitan Washington area. Thanks to the help of the Overseas Briefing Center and the Family Liaison Office, a volunteer file is being set up. Each volunteer is ready to assist and "be a buddy" to any new arrival, including American-born spouses unfamiliar with living in their own nation's capital. It is hoped that since these volunteers have experienced culture shock or re-entry symptoms either in this country or overseas, they are well prepared to help. These spouses come from all cultures and backgrounds, speak many languages and will, therefore, be able to understand and identify with the newcomer.

The group, which meets once a month at the Overseas Briefing Center, is anxious to develop the support network in every local community. To help, you do not have to be foreign-born or speak several languages. You must, simply, be willing to remember how it was when you first arrived in a totally new culture. If you can recall how you wished someone could have helped you, in very concrete aspects of everyday living, or in understanding your new surroundings, you can be of great assistance to new arrivals.

Summer is almost upon us and with it comes the time when most moves occur. It is important that the network be organized and in place.

To volunteer, all you need is the desire to help. Sometimes a simple phone call is sufficient. If you work, your help might be offered during the week-end.

To find out how you can support this group, or to offer your suggestions, please call: Mary Skocz 920-0885; Anna Dworken 362-2694; or Maggy Morse 385-3852 or 223-5796.

Writers' Group Success Stories

Works of three members of the AAFSW Writers' Group have already been published or will be published soon.

Maria K. Bauer, a member of the Writers' Group for over ten years, signed a contract with Overlook Press of New York for an August or September 1983 publication of her memoir, *Beyond the Chestnut Trees*.

She credits a good part of her success to the support and help the other members of the Writers' Group gave to her while she was working on her book.

Ruth Obee collaborated with her son, Brock, on an article, "Baboon-Watch, A Day in the African Bush," which is tentatively scheduled for late fall publication by *Ranger Rick*, a National Wildlife Federation publication.

Patricia G. Erickson had her third travel book published in February 1983 by a German publishing house. This book, *ROAMING 'ROUND FRANKFURT*, is a 260-page guide for foreigners doing sightseeing trips around Frankfurt and the 50 or more towns surrounding it. An earlier version of *ROAMING 'ROUND FRANKFURT* was published in 1972. Her second book, *ROAMING 'ROUND HOLLAND* was published in 1978 and has been through four editions.

Ruth Obee and Pat Erickson will edit the *AAFSW News* beginning with the September 1983 issue. The present editors wish them luck and only good news to report. We are pleased to leave the newsletter in such capable hands.