

## Oral History Project

*Documenting the contributions of 20th century Foreign Service women to diplomatic life*

She came into the Foreign Service in 1918; today she is 96, and her Foreign Service memories have been immortalized by the F.S. Family Oral History Project. This lady worked as a translator in Rome and married a young Foreign Service Officer who was the private secretary to the Ambassador. That was the beginning of a fascinating life's tale which has now been recorded.

The Project is documenting the contributions of 20th century Foreign Service women to diplomatic life. For two years, it has been taping and transcribing the personal interviews of these women, thus adding a rich dimension to traditional Foreign Service history. This ongoing project operates out of the home office of **Jewell Fenzi, the Coordinator**, who was recently interviewed by the **NEWS Editor, Helen Fouché**.

*Hope Meyer had the vision a decade ago; today's technology has made it a reality.*

Associate Coordinator **Hope Meyer**, had the vision over a decade ago, but it had to wait for today's computer technology to become a reality. The interviewers have been formally trained in techniques and technology through workshops given by experts in the field of oral history. The Project's manual is based on the Smithsonian's oral history guidelines. However, **Jewell Fenzi** feels strongly that "The most important qualification for an interviewer is to be a knowledgeable FS spouse; to know what kind of life the women led, and to be aware of the milestones in the 20th century — the McCarthy Era, Wristonization, the 1972 Policy Directive, creation of FLO."

**Jewell** says, "One of the fascinating things about the project is that each interview takes on a life of its own. To me, this is what makes it a continually fascinating undertaking. We do have a list of topics and questions which we keep in front of us, yet each interview comes out very differently in content and in style.

"I have a tendency to turn on the tape recorder, ask a few questions, and just sit back and see what kind of story is going to unfold. I do try to keep people on track if there is wandering into areas that are not FS related."

An interviewee's privacy is guarded very carefully. A few interviews have been published in *STATE MAGAZINE*, and every word was approved by the subject first. Occasionally there are comments or even *entire* interviews that are off-the-record. Such a tape is restricted with a Red Seal, and that section of the transcript is edited out. "We have a few of these," says **Jewell**, "but not many. By having such a category, we are able to be given very privileged information which ultimately could be quite valuable." Over 100 hours of interviews are on tape, and 50 interviews are in various stages of completion.

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**Jewell** relates a delightful happening that obviously took place many years before the 1972 Directive on Wives! "Elizabeth Lewis Cabot tells the story of being evaluated by the Chief of Personnel when she arrived in Washington as a young Foreign Service wife. In those days, the evaluation of the wife could determine the importance (or *lack of importance!*) of the post given to the officer husband.

"This evaluator was a bachelor from New England who was interested in prison reform. The new Foreign Service wives quickly learned how to tip the scales in their favor. Word got out to the young women who were to be evaluated that they should remove all makeup, wear no fingernail polish, and dress in a little blue dress with a white collar. Wear white gloves, look very prim, *bone up on prison reform* — and a good mark was practically guaranteed!"



**Jewell Fenzi, Coordinator of the Family Foreign Service Oral History Project.**

The Project is sponsored by the Association for Diplomatic Studies, which has amalgamated three FS related oral history projects into a *Foreign Affairs Oral History Program* at Georgetown University. "We are a part of that Program, and our transcripts are being placed in the Lauinger Library where the Program has its office. The transcripts are being made available to students at Georgetown's Foreign Service School."

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—**Jewell Fenzi**

Even more important, in **Jewell Fenzi's** view, "The collection will be there for young women who are embarking on



Left to right: **Marta Schley Squire**, transcriber, **Mary Lou Weiss**, interviewer, and **Jewell Fenzi**, Coordinator, confer in the Oral History Project office. Hi-tech equipment, interview progress charts, tapes and transcripts coexist with a vibrant Brazilian primitive and folklore statuette.

careers as FS spouses. They can listen to tapes, or read the transcripts, to learn about their legacy as spouses, firsthand from the women who have been there, all the way back to World War I."

It's natural to wonder if a book will come from this project. "We should do a book; I would feel very badly if we became someone else's research assistants. We should get it out in some form before true researchers have access to it; we are considering the form now."

Some Foreign Service women with exciting stories to tell hesitate to participate in the Oral History Project because they are considering publication themselves. Jewell is frank in assessing the dilemma posed by copyright guarantees. "We can put a restriction on this material; however if we are collecting it to improve the general knowledge of the people in and out of the Foreign Service, and we keep it under wraps, what good is it? Our budget is so tight that we would hesitate to finance the transcription of an interview for which we could not control the ultimate use." Interviewees are requested to sign a *deed of gift* which puts their words in the public domain; no one has refused to sign that so far.

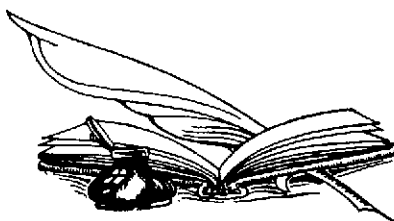
Funding for the project? "Hand to mouth, at the moment!" laughs Jewell. "Most of our income has come from private donations given by Foreign Service family members, though we did have one substantial contribution from a

historian who is not connected with the Foreign Service. We greatly appreciated the contribution made by AAFSW." The Benefit Tea last year provided funds for much of their expenses throughout this year. Also, interviewees usually make donations; they well understand that their contributions help make their own interviews possible. "The primary expense in oral history is getting the word from tape to type," explains Jewell.

Abigail Adams was the first Foreign Service woman to record her observations of U.S. diplomatic life; today the tape recorder has replaced her quill. And the Oral History Project has picked up on the work.

*Helen Fouché, Editor*

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*All Foreign Service women are invited to this year's Benefit Tea. (Invitation below.) The Tea honors those who have contributed in various ways to the Project. Donations from guests will help finance work during the coming year.* □

## Year's Programs Start With the Arts



The 1988-89 monthly programs will commence on October 11 with a most delightful performance by ten *Japanese Ladies from Okinawa*. They will treat us to traditional Japanese dances and display the Art of Ikebana.

Join us! The program coupon will be in the October issue of the *NEWS*. □

*Jacquetta Searle-Grey, Program Chair*

## Volunteers Needed for Program Committee

If you enjoy the monthly programs, why not help organize an event? You can work on monthly program planning, special events such as a visit to a museum, perhaps serve as a hostess at meetings. If you are interested, please call **Jacquetta Searle-Grey** at 522-2245.



*Under the Honorary Patronage of Mrs. George L. Shultz*

*The Members of*

*The Foreign Service Family Oral History Project*

*request the pleasure of your company*

*at their second annual*

*Benefit Tea*

*Tuesday, the eighteenth of October*

*at D.A.G.O.R.'s Bacon House*

*1801 F. Street, N.W.*

*Washington, DC*

*from four-thirty to six-thirty*

*Minimum contribution \$25. Please make check payable to ADS/FSFOH Project.*

*Mail to Goleen Schweitzer, 1130 N. 25th St., Arlington, VA 22207.*

**THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE IN COSTS** for the Monthly Coffee-Meetings. Members will now be requested to pay \$4.50, guests \$5.00.

AAFSW expenses for these special meetings on the Eighth Floor have risen substantially over the years; regrettably some of these costs have to be passed on to our members. The 1987-88 AAFSW Board determined that it is essential to take this step in order to help defray at least a small portion of our monthly Coffee-Meeting expenses. □