

## Interview with Ruth Enslie Kotula

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

RUTH ENSLIE KOTULA

Interviewed by: Kristie Miller

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*Q: This is Kristie Miller, on March 9, 1990, interviewing Ruth Enslie Kotula at her home for the Foreign Service Oral History.*

Actually, even before the post maybe you could talk a bit about your pre-Foreign Service work experience if any.

KOTULA: After graduating from Fairleigh-Dickinson I taught for — well, I was teaching for I-I/2 years before I went into the Foreign Service, or married a Foreign Service person. He was at his first post, Cairo, Egypt when we married, though not when we met; he went there in April 1966. I had known him for a little more than a year before. At that particular time, we were talking about getting married, but then he was accepted in the Service, at the very lowest staff position that there was, which put him on two years probation; they wouldn't have accepted him had we been married.

*Q: What was his position?*

KOTULA: The earlier designation was FS Staff I4 but they changed it to FSS I0. He was the Pouch Clerk in Cairo, so they wouldn't have accepted him if he were married; that's what we were told. Kirk wanted to go into the Foreign Service, he had been going to school part-time — I met him right after he got out of the Marine Corps. He'd served about

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three years overseas as Marine Guard at different Embassies, in Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), and Phnom Penh (Cambodia). When he got out I was finishing college, and he had started attending Fairleigh-Dickinson College at night.

*Q: Then he went into the Foreign Service, and was in about eight months before you married. Once he was in, that restriction was lifted?*

KOTULA: Well, my parents were in the process of moving from New Jersey to California and there was a possibility that I could move with them, although I was out on my own, with my own apartment, and teaching full-time in an elementary school of the Chester public school system. So it was either a decision as to whether I wanted to go to California, but Kirk and I were in, so I decided to go visit him, in December 1966.

*Q: So you didn't really plan to get married when you went out there?*

KOTULA: No, we had no pre-plans because I thought that two-year probation would be in effect. And indeed, it kind of was, because I went to Egypt, he asked me to marry him, we were married there about three days after I arrived. I had taken a few days off from school and was in Cairo for about three weeks. I had to come back to finish up my teaching contract. That's what I wanted to do, because there were no pre-plans of any kind.

So we were married. I ended up paying my way back to the States, and I also paid my way back from overseas even though at that point I'd been married for six months. I was due back in Cairo on June 23, 1967. (both laugh) That was a good entry into the Foreign Service because he was [evacuated] during the Six-Day War in '67 and was sent temporarily to Athens, and I met him there.

*Q: What happened to the restriction? Why were you allowed to get married?*

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KOTULA: Well, the personnel person in Cairo looked it up in the regulations and said, "Well, there isn't any regulation about her if you marry here." But I wouldn't be picked up as a dependent until the next post. Or, if I had opted to stay in Cairo —

*Q: But they weren't going to pay your way back for your teaching.*

KOTULA: No. They wouldn't pay my way to Cairo, the second go-round. And I came out tAthens on my own also.

*Q: What did you do after that?*

KOTULA: (with sigh and laughter) You never had to be the wife of the Mail Clerk!  
(Interviewer laughs)

*Q: So what was his next assignment?*

KOTULA: I do remember a humorous thing. Kirk had told me a lot of stories about the Foreign Service. He knew that there were difficulties, for instance, for women.

*Q: So you were aware of that before you were married.*

KOTULA: I was somewhat aware of that.

*Q: What kinds of things did he choose to tell you? What did he find important?*

KOTULA: (after pausing to reflect) That it wasn't always easy, that there were pressures to do certain things for women to support their husbands as far as their career goes. And I remember one thing that was going on in Cairo at the time. It was about a 300-person post at that time, one of the biggest posts before the '67 War. I was there for less than three weeks, but this was what a lot of the women were upset about: there was a junior FSO's wife there who was very highly trained in nursing and psychological counsel background. She had a Ph.D. and this, that and the other thing. Well, she had taken over [many duties],

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work in a children's home in Cairo, and the work received a lot of recognition for her paramedic [abilities], which received a reward, and it ended up that she had done all the work. And when the award was announced, everybody thought Margie was going to get it. It was given to the ambassador's wife, whom nobody had ever seen on the project. (she laughs heartily) I had arrived right after that happened, and I think every woman who talked to me said, [in angry tone of voice] "This is what happens in the Foreign Service!" This is the thing I found current, that ran for a number of years.

*Q: Which is?*

KOTULA: Doing [something for nothing], you do a certain amount of work, you do a lot of work in some areas, and there is no credit for it.

*Q: Either from the host government or from the American?*

KOTULA: Or from the American community within the embassy, you know, the people that you work with. And I think that's probably the hardest.

*Q: So this woman, Marjorie, never even got recognition, say, from the ambassador or the ambassador's wife for the work she had done?*

KOTULA: Oh, no, no.

*Q: And you found that that kind of thing was the hardest to accept.*

KOTULA: I think it was. And this was in '66, and for the first few years. It was changed in 1972. I was on my husband's Efficiency Report and I was written up as doing whatever I did.

*Q: So, in a way, that was recognition -*

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KOTULA: That was recognition, and you know that's the part I thought, "Well, gosh, this is kind of antiquated and this is unfair." But I also felt a sense of pride that I did get the recognition from that. And I've talked to a number of other women and much as they, some women, didn't like having to do these things, there was also a sense of pride that at least you did get that recognition.

*Q: And when the '72 directive abolished that, because there was nothing to replace it —*

KOTULA: Again, I talked with a number of other women, I think at first there was a sense of relief. That now we could say "no." And yet there was that nagging undercurrent, that feeling that how was this going to work. (she laughs suddenly) And indeed, as years went by, nothing changed except that there was no recognition.

*Q: You still had to do the work.*

KOTULA: You still had to do the work, and that made it worse, that made it — I think that really compounded it.

*Q: Since there was no legal obligation to do the work, why did we have to do the work?*

KOTULA: Well, I think we felt — I know I did, and I know a number of other women I talked to felt — I don't think this is a particularly simple subject. There were a number of things. These are just feelings of my own but also the information gathered from other women. I know I myself felt a high sense of "this is what you do, this is the right thing to do, this is to support your husband's career, and this was part of my role in life." There is a very strong sense of obligation.

*Q: Did you feel a sense of obligation only to him or also to the Foreign Service? Did you feel that you were a part of the Foreign Service as a spouse?*

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KOTULA: Yes, that was part of it. I don't know whether that was the stronger thing in my case, but that certainly was part of it. There was a feeling and I had a feeling that we were representing our government. That's the way it was and you wanted to do the best job that you could. I guess that's what happens from your having lived through the [John F.] Kennedy years! That was the feeling. This was in '66 and that was still the feeling. A lot of women had that feeling, I think.

*Q: When your husband was then sent to Athens, what happened after that?*

KOTULA: Well, it was interesting (she laughs) because they said I was expected in Cairo on June 23. What happened was, when he was assigned to Athens temporarily, anybody at that point who hadn't been overseas for 18 months — he had been for 14 months by then — was put in a safe-haven place and waiting for direct assignment. And you didn't know how long it was going to be until they found a post for you. He was put to work in the embassy there, and we wanted to know immediately, well, what do I do?

He was told by the embassy kind of informally, “ Well, since you're assigned here temporarily, it would be better not to have your wife join you at this point. Wait until you get the new assignment.” I had my own tourist passport, since I was paying my way, so I was very upset by that. I flashed back a telegram, which I still remember to this day that went to the embassy in Athens when I'd received Kirk's correspondence on the matter. I said GOVERNMENT WON'T STOP THIS TOURIST ARRIVING (she breaks up with laughter) and giving the flight number and the day. And that was it, I just arrived.

*Q: But they didn't pay for you?*

KOTULA: No, well, that's why I felt — they weren't paying for anything.

*Q: You had a non-person status.*

KOTULA: That's exactly what I had. That's right.

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*Q: Great. So then what happened?*

KOTULA: I think we ended up being there for a month or a little more. Then we got direct assignment to Ankara, Turkey. And at that point they picked me up, I got a Diplomatic passport and a ticket. But in the meantime they wouldn't pick up any personal property, household effects or clothing or anything like that. I had mailed a lot of things to Cairo. Fortunately, the boxes got there and Kirk just never unpacked them. So eventually, six months later, when they finally cleared things out of Cairo, our stuff arrived pretty much okay still packed in the original boxes I had mailed to the APO. I had to pay for mailing other things, too. The stuff going from Cairo to Ankara was covered.

*Q: So, finally, there you were in Ankara, a full-fledged Foreign Service spouse, what was Kirk's job there?*

KOTULA: That's when he went into communications. He became a national communicator. I'll never forget this — he had no training in the equipment, because he was Athens when they assigned that slot and of course I think they asked him if he'd had any sort of training whatsoever and he said, "A little." But I remember him going in the first day on duty and he didn't know how to turn on the machine! (laughing uproariously) It was, like, he felt mortified. Anyway, he received his training there, on the job, on the spot so to speak.

*Q: You were in Ankara for-?*

KOTULA: Our direct assignment was for a year.

*Q: Your first post. How was your role there? How did you fit in?*

KOTULA: Well, because of the way I came in. In one way it was exciting and in another way I kind of felt like a non-person too still, because I had none of the Foreign Service orientation, for instance. And there wasn't really anything at post. Years later there was

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the Family Liaison Office, but I remember no real welcoming. I think I recall going to one luncheon that the Admin Counselor's wife gave in her home. All the junior women ended up moving her furniture around every day. (laughter) That was the old Foreign Service, you see! I'll never forget that. You were invited there one time in the year.

*Q: Were you able to paint or pursue your-*

KOTULA: I did, that's what I did do. I spent that year painting, and indeed I had a one-person show at the Bi-National Center, and I also gave lectures with slides on contemporary American art history. So I did have that.

*Q: You've spoken to me in the past about your feeling that the wives of junior staff people were discriminated against to a certain degree. Did you feel that in Ankara or was that later?*

KOTULA: Well, I'm probably going to be talking a lot about opposites, because there are so many opposites all the way through that I was aware of, that I was always dealing with. And in dealing with opposites, being a very junior person I definitely had the feeling that I did get a lot of praise and approval, especially from the older women who'd been in the Foreign Service longer. Because anything I did — well, the painting, or if I did anything with the different women's groups and being thmost junior woman at the post, anything that I did, or entertaining, was “wonderful.” Because looking at Kirk and what his position was, it was completely non-threatening; and since he was the most junior person in the embassy pretty much for the first few years at several posts, I was no threat to them whatsoever. So for anything that I did I got a lot of praise and a lot of approval.

But then there was also this feeling on the other side, tha(she gropes for words) — well, I was completely non-threatening. My husband didn't amount to —

*Q: Did you feel condescended to? Patronized a little bit?*

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KOTULA: Exactly.

Q: *"Look at what she can do!"*

KOTULA: (Laughing) Exactly! So it was always a kind of message with two opposites. I think that message persisted all the way through. As my husband's role changed and he moved up in the FSO corps — he came into the "Mustang Program" in '73 and eventually ended up with consul general, at the last post. So it was a steady move upward. But that message didn't really change-

Q: *Even when he was consul general?*

KOTULA: No. Then what happened was, it reversed itself, I think. No matter what I did — because then I did an awful lot of entertaining and women's club things which I did because I felt very strongly were supporting his career, then it was never enough. What happened later on was you didn't get any praise, or very little, and as a matter of fact you got criticism.

Q: *What kind of criticism? What kinds of things did people say?*

KOTULA: It was more of a subtle. It's hard to put into words. There was an undercurrent of jealousy. If you did things very well, which made me pleased with myself. I sometimes got the feeling that it was a threat. It was very threatening to some other women.

Q: *That they thought you were setting a standard they might not be willing to match?*

KOTULA: Yes. And it wasn't just me doing this. I'd look around and a number of other women that I talked to had these same feelings throughout the year.

Q: *Once their husbands rose to a position of some significance in the embassy hierarchy?*

KOTULA: Yes.

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*Q: Did you feel that because you were college-educated that their thinking of you was as being of your husband's rank? Again, not thinking of you as a person, really, in your own right; that you were just sort of an adjunct to your husband? Your rank was his right or your status was his status regardless of your own achievements?*

KOTULA: Early on I think obviously my education and background and achievements were very much appreciated or commented on or noticed. But as Kirk went up in the hierarchy, then my personal accomplishments — meaning my painting, I wasn't really teaching as years went by but I was a professional artist doing a number of exhibits and whatever — although I received some praise and recognition for that, certainly a lot of recognition in a way — it was kind of a two-edged sword. Again. And then much more tied to what Kirk's position was.

*Q: Almost that it was inappropriate for you to do that kind of thing?*

KOTULA: There was that feeling at times, yes. Or perhaps you shouldn't be after selling your paintings! (hearty laugh) But this is what I do.

*Q: That's very interesting.*

KOTULA: Yes. I mean, selling is demeaning.

*Q: Almost as the feeling that if your husband can support you, you don't have to support yourself.*

KOTULA: Right. And then the other feeling was — I obviously had my studio in the houses we lived in, so I worked in the home painting on a regular schedule. So I wasn't visible as going to a place to work like some other wives as more and more jobs were opening up for women part-time of what have you in the embassy; I wasn't physically seen as working. What I got more and more at times was, when I would say, “No, I'm painting for an exhibit and I cannot do this, I'd like to but I really can't” or sometimes I wouldn't say “I would like

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to," I'd say, "I can't, this is more important to me." There was an underlying current of "well, you can change your schedule around and do whatever you want, you don't have a real job."

*Q: Would you get this more from Kirk's superiors? Or from people who were under him?*

KOTULA: I only got this from women.

*Q: Of the superior officers?*

KOTULA: Yes.

*Q: That they wanted you to help them with their agenda and they didn't accept that you had another role.*

KOTULA: It was a number of women at the post, not always the superiors, sometimes there would be some very junior women who'd put forth the same feeling.

*Q: So it wasn't just a status thing, it was just that nobody really considered that you had a real job even though it was pretty visible by —*

KOTULA: It wasn't just me because through the number of posts that I had I saw other people who were artists and other women who were writers or what have you and they [had] very similar feelings. A number of times I thought, "Well, my gosh, why do I have to feel guilty about saying no?" But that's what I ended up feeling. I thought for a number of years off and on, well, maybe it's just me. But, again, I talked to a number of other women, because this as I say really bothered me from time to time. And that feeling was definitely there.

Nobody was completely honest about it. (after a laugh) That's the thing that I'm trying to get at: the dishonesty about what's really happening; what's really going on after what people are saying or acting like is going on.

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*Q: What's the party line here? What's the ostensible thing that everybody is saying? That you don't have to work any more because of the '72 directive?*

KOTULA: Everybody is saying that you don't have to work any more, and if you say you don't want to do something, that's perfectly fine, you don't have to, in fact we encourage you to be your own person.

*Q: What's the reality?*

KOTULA: The reality is exactly the opposite. And it can be so much the opposite that I think it can be a pure nightmare. (she laughs again)

*Q: Give me an example.*

KOTULA: Well, you can be ostracized. The posts that I've had some of them quite difficult, hardship posts in very isolated areas of the world. There was Antananarivo, Madagascar; there was Dhahran, Saudi Arabia: that was like getting off the plane and stepping into the 13th century.

*Q: Yes! They are very small, isolated posts.*

KOTULA: I've not had a large post. I've had very small, isolated posts, and less than half were even what you'd call medium-sized posts.

*Q: So in these small, isolated posts you tended to feel the pressure even more?*

KOTULA: Well, yes and no. At a really small post, where it was really bad, a lot of time what would happen is you got things that — people pulled together more, and so what you think would be absolutely awful situations sometimes were better to deal with. People pulled together and helped one another more. But you didn't seem to have anything in the middle. It was either really, really good with a group of people, people getting together personality-wise and being able to work together and play together — when you get to

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small posts like this, you had to have that ability because you worked and associated with the same people all the time; which could be a nightmare if you didn't get along with them. And then on the other hand you had people that you couldn't get along with. So there wasn't much in the middle at a small post.

Now at a medium-sized post, I experienced more difficulty at medium-sized posts.

*Q: What kinds of difficulty?*

KOTULA: There seemed to be more expectations. Well, okay, at small posts, if you pulled together, there was more of a family spirit, I suppose, so there was more recognition of what you did. At a medium post, that kind of fell by the wayside.

*Q: And yet you still had a lot of work to do. You had representation-*

KOTULA: Representational work of one kind or another whether or not your husband was in a representational function or job.

*Q: I remember that when you were in Dhahran, where your husband was a communicator, you were one of the most helpful people for me, when I arrived. You were the one who took me to meet the General's wife at the military post-*

KOTULA: Gee, I forgot about that.

*Q: I was very grateful, because it was my first post, my first real post, the first post where anyone had done any of the welcoming activities, and you took a major part in it, because there was no — not only did the consul general not have a wife, but the DCM didn't have a wife either! You really took the lead. You were kind of filling in the gap.*

KOTULA: You've brought up another interesting point. In a number of my posts this was a recurrent pattern and I don't know whether it became more or less the same. You just mentioned Dhahran, and that was an earlier post, but what I saw was —especially in a

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small post: Asuncion was one when we were there. There were three officers without wives in the top level of the embassy. So there was a bigger proportion representing the embassy in the women's clubs or different things that the embassy women wanted to sponsor. And also in the mid-level wives to do.

*Q: And that was sometimes you?*

KOTULA: For a number of years that was me. Yes.

*Q: And again, you were having to do these high-representational-*

KOTULA: I wasn't the only one. There are a huge number of women out there that are in that category in the Foreign Service. They don't receive the full recognition for that. A lot of times, if it's representational functions, neither they nor their husbands are receiving money for it.

*Q: How did you cope with that? Did you have to use your own outside income?*

KOTULA: Oh-h-h-h, in some of the entertaining that we did, yes, we did have to do that. Or you just decided you didn't want to do it and then sometimes you felt guilty(laughing) about that because-

*Q: Because you would have to dip into your own money.*

KOTULA: Right.

*Q: That's a very good point. And you say that's not uncommon.*

KOTULA: No, that's the sort of thing that's very common.

*Q: And yet if you don't do it, what makes you feel guilty, or who makes you feel guilty if you're not doing it?*

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KOTULA: Well, it's not just your husband's entertaining, it can be sponsoring — a lot of what I did was opening my home up for women's clubs' groups or special interest groups in women's clubs, or what have you. And of course everybody would volunteer to help with a number of things, but it was stil— it was more difficult to do. For instance, if I were in a large enough house I would have meetings that would be 50, 60, 70 women. It's not like I had a staff. Oh, here it is: the difference for that may not be monetary — well, it was, because if the DCM's wife, for instance, they have a staff to provide all the help and the work that goes along with that. And when a mid-level staff wife does it, there isn't a staff, and we pay for a maid and do the work. And although other women help it's not exactly the same.

*Q: I think that's a very good point.*

KOTULA: And the same thing with representational entertaining in relation to your husband's job, when we always gave a number of parties when it was felt it was needed; especially when it was Costa Rica. I had one maid. We paid for it but we were getting anywhere from 50 to 100 people-

*Q: But he was the consul general, right?*

KOTULA: He made consul general. And, okay, we could hire bartenders or this or that but it was still a tremendous amount of work that had to be done. We had a representational allowance there but there was no way it began to cover... You couldn't afford to hire somebody and still be paid for the food! (she laughs) That's the way it is.

*Q: How do you think Americans rated in Costa Rica as far as representation was concerned? Did you feel that you entertained as much as other posts did, or did you have to entertain more, or were you not able to entertain as much as you thought you should?*

KOTULA: I think we entertained a lot more there, because of its location. The ambassador, because of the location and time in the location there, that was one of the huge strains

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that was put on him. All-I-I-I of the visiting Congressmen because of the location... What was happening in Nicaragua, what was happening in Panama and because that was the meaty place to visit, I think there must have been every Congressman and everybody in Washington you could think of with a plausible reason to go down and see the “war zone.” And the embassy had to provide — oh, it was such a strain those years we were there. As a matter of fact, directives went around toward the end of that, after Gramm-Rudman went into effect, where “we don't have money to do this.” And at times there would be “Would anybody volunteer to house Congressman So-and-So?”

*Q: Because Gramm-Rudman affected their travel-*

KOTULA: Right. It affected their travel and their per diem, and therefore we were asked if we could do it out of our pockets and the kindness of our hearts and our patriotic duty is really what it- (laughing heartily)

*Q: You've mentioned before-KOTULA: Well, at Dhahran it was a similar thing. At Dhahran there were no hotels, no place that anybody could stay, whether they were technicians coming in or visiting whatever. So there we were all so happy to see another American or somebody else who didn't live on the compound and that we didn't work and eat and sleep wit(breaks down laughing) that we a lot of times very gladly put up anybody that came off an airplane and brought us outside news and was different to talk to. Well, it was the same sort of thing: we had to do it, sort of.*

*Q: But it must have been a terrific strain in Costa Rica.*

KOTULA: It was. The time we were in Costa Rica was a tremendous amount of stress. Everybody in that post was under an extreme amount of stress.

*Q: What were some of the things that made it so stressful?*

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KOTULA: There was the policy that was going on at the time... We were there in '84 and left in January '89; under three different ambassadors, with extremely different personalities. The embassy tripled in size during those years. It was a strain to provide services because of all the visiting dignitaries and what have you. There would be at any given time three or four or five or six each week. They would come in and want services and what have you. This was just a normal week there, it was unbelievable. And it went on month after month after month.

*Q: Then when Gramm-Rudman came in, how did that affect the embassy?*

KOTULA: Well, back and forth there was less money to do things internally in the embassy and still provide the services that everybody felt needed to be done when anybody visited. This is not uncommon, it happens periodically throughout the Foreign Service, but when you get in a money crunch and you have visitors come through post, everybody works. It isn't just the wives. I mean, wives shuffle around wives of visiting persons, keep them happy on shopping tours and this that and the other. And there's only a certain amount of money. So it was happening at the same time with Gramm-Rudman with all the money cutbacks, personnel cutbacks; personnel shortages showing up. Especially in the administrative and consular.

*Q: Your husband being consul general, how did that affect him?*

KOTULA: More strain. He didn't know when one American left in a section whether there would be — maybe there would only a two-week gap between assignments and sometimes there were overlaps — the person leaving and the new person arriving would arrive a few days or a week ahead to kind of get orientated, et cetera. By the last summer of '89 the gaps — what was coming out of the Department was “it's not unreasonable to expect” — and this kept changing, but first of all “it's not unreasonable to expect gaps of a month or six weeks.” And then they'd say — but overseas we were really experiencing

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double that. And then the directive came out saying “it’s not unreasonable to experience three or four months.”

The two hardest sections hit were administrative and consular. But all the sections began experiencing that. A big reason why administrative and consular — especially consular — was hit is because they cut back intake of new Foreign Service officers in half with Gramm- Rudman. And of course in some important ways Personnel systems supplement consular work, so that that was a shortage there in big part. Another thing was happening too — TDY money was less and less, and TDY positions' money went for when you needed fill-in for Political people but there was no money for covering TDY people for administrative and consular. A whole combination of things, some that I'm not even-

*Q: How did that impact the families that were there?*

KOTULA: Oh! The stress level just went up and up and up and up. As the political situation — well, in San Jose, for instance, that's the third largest American community of retirees living outside the U.S. of any place in the world. Because of our policy, there's a lot of anti-American feeling. Among retired Americans there, a lot of anti-Government feeling. A lot of them were very much against the Nicaraguan policy that we were carrying on at the time.

*Q: So you had heat from them?*

KOTULA: We had distrust. That doesn't make it all black-and-white either, because a number of retired Americans in Costa Rica were there for various and sundry reasons, like some of them for tax evasio(she laughs) so you had that, too. And then you add on the political situation at the time-

*Q: Did you find it hard to make contacts in the American community? Did they tend to be distrustful of Foreign Service people?*

KOTULA: Yes. Angry.

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*Q: And with the stresses being brought on, how did that affect morale at the embassy?*

KOTULA: Morale was terrible. (laughing) Sure.

*Q: What did you do for social life? Did you socialize with them, or did you make friends outside of the American community?*

KOTULA: I made a number of friends outside of the American community. Being there that long and being active in the outside community, which I really was, through my art and also women's groups. There were three or four women's clubs there, in different varieties. And partly because of my art, too, because I would give talks on different aspects of art. I just thought that was what I should do, too, as representin[trailing off]. But the big thing was distrust, I think. There was that double-edged feeling.

You're being treated very nice because you are part of the American embassy; and the strongest feeling that you got, the reaction just under the surface, of complete distrust.

*Q: You've talked to me in the past about some personal problems that you had in your post at Antananarivo. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?*

KOTULA: Yes. I had a series of deaths in my family. Five deaths in five years. I was an only child. When I went overseas I had both sets of grandparents and my parents were still living.

When we were in Ankara, Turkey I lost my grandparents on my father's side, within six months of each other. While we were in Saudi Arabia my mother committed suicide. A year later, my maternal grandmother, whom I was very close to, died. And I had an episode where I, because I hadn't done a proper grieving, I was halfway around the world, very isolated, that probably added to the feeling. Anyway, I attempted suicide. I was medically evacuated. Well, actually went out — we left on our own and went back slowly through Africa, I wasn't put on a plane in a straitjacket. (she laughs) But the reality of it was

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the assignment was broken and so it was the Office of Medical Services which brought me the funds and I went into psychotherapy for close to 18 months, here in Washington. So I had first-hand experience of what the Office of Medical Services does for one with problems.

*Q: And how would you rate what they did?*

KOTULA: That was in '72. The one thing that I think they probably do well is that it's not a stigma. There are a lot of personal problems in the Foreign Service and they're very open and it doesn't seem to be a stigma. You have problems, they deal with them and it's over with. And as long as you're deemed okay you go back overseas. It doesn't impact — it certainly didn't then, and it doesn't now, obviously. I think they've become even more open in the last few years.

So that's a positive. Medically, financially, once you're deemed to have a problem, I think they really go all out to give you the proper help and assistance that you need. The difference between then and what I've just gone through is that there's little concept of helping the whole family, for instance.

*Q: Then?*

KOTULA: It was just Kirk and me at the time. I would think that if that would have happened — now, if somebody has a, for instance, a suicide attempt within a family, it's urged that the whole family get counseling. This is the difference between the approach, the psychiatry, too. So I think the Foreign Service has moved along quite well with that.

*Q: Do you want to talk about what you've gone through recently?*

KOTULA: Well, what I've gone through recently is quite like a nightmare. (laughing) In the process of getting divorced from my husband, he's had problems of alcoholism. The Department of State has paid for this and treatment for this and that. My daughter had

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a suicide attempt and a possible problem with alcohol addiction and depression. She's fifteen.

*Q: Do you feel that their problems were exacerbated by the strains in Costa Rica, where you were living at the time these things arose?*

KOTULA: The problems my husband was having? (after a pause) Yes, without a doubt. I can go back to the time when Gramm-Rudman kicked in. There was a time there when my husband was in the newspaper practically every day.

*Q: What kind of stuff were they writing about him?*

KOTULA: Things related to Irangate.

*Q: Why was he involved?*

KOTULA: He was involved with some minor characters. Well, you might say involved but I'd put that in quotes. But the question mark, he wasn't really — there were a group of kind of soldier of fortune people arrested, a French, British and American arrested up on the northern border of Nicaragua; two were Americans. And, of course, he being the consul general had to deal with these two Americans in jail. He was their spokesman.

There was that involvement that put him in the newspaper. And then there was another character who came into the consulate for consular services who was one of the minor characters bu(she laughs) a major character in Costa Rica. That put my husband in the newspaper every day.

*Q: So there it is in the newspaper, taking the heat every day for the political situation.*

KOTULA: Taking the heat for that. And we had several threats — against him personally and several occasions of bomb threats to the house. So you had that and there was

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constant security. Whether it was made up or real, who knows? It was a tremendous pressure at times.

*Q: And you were short-staffed in the Consular Section because of Gramm-Rudman effect. So these three different factors rain on him.*

KOTULA: Exactly. Part of it has to do with an old problem that's gone on in the Foreign Service for a long time. The last — and this creates a tremendous amount of pressure for people working in the field — when you get into problem areas, o— how can I say it? — the lack of support from Washington, or the lack of felt support from Washington, you don't perceive any support from Washington, whether it's —

*Q: It's like the ether: maybe it's there but you don't see it.*

KOTULA: That's right. And I think — it wasn't just the fact that my husband was in the papers every day or every week or what have you, in the daily papers in Costa Rica; these went on wire services across the States. But this was in the middle of Irangate and had to do with Iran and he was being interrogated by all different groups coming down from Washington from Congress, FBI, the whole embassy was. Of course, Irangate became public knowledge. That was around Thanksgiving of '87. Anyway, you lefa number of people, it wasn't just my husband, the stress was tremendous in the embassy.

*Q: What do you feel Washington should have done?*

KOTULA: I don't know. I don't know whether there's an answer for it, except that the people working there, and it wasn't just my husband, the whole top echelon in the embassy was under a tremendous amount of stress. And the effect of stress did some pretty awful things to some of those people. He was not the only one affected by it by any means. And there wasn't any recognition of this, or help, preventive.

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*Q: Like, nobody was sent out to counsel these people or try to — do you think that might have helped?*

KOTULA: The only thing that came out was - of course, the Regional Medical Psychiatrist came through every three or four months, but then when Gramm-Rudman kicked in he was with us for less. He would be there for two or three days and would give little brown bag luncheons on, you know, how to handle your stress.

I think there's a big need in the Foreign Service for wives. I think the stress at some of these posts, and not just at San Jose but it's absolutely tremendous. I mean, I thought way back early on in the Foreign Service it does — stress can do crazy things to people, make them so whacko, and yet there's no — I didn't get the wives' orientation when I came into the Foreign Service, I did get it when Kirk went into the Officer Corps in '73 and I went to the wives' seminar and some other courses that the Foreign Service Institute offered wives at that time. And yet I had seen up to that point I had certainly seen some extremely stressful situations on posts. When we were in Cair— I had been there only three weeks when that post was under tremendous surveillance. I mean, in Cairo during the '67 War everything was bugged. You couldn't have conversations any place but in your cars or out in the desert, perhaps. Running your car was the only way you could trust your car!

In Athens after evacuation the people got together. They'd been in Athens probably three weeks by the time I got there, and they'd still be sitting in little Greek restaurants up in the plaka and whispering, you know? Because they used to whisper in Cairo. Somebody in the group would say, "Why are they whispering?" (both laugh) And they would use funny words for different things, you know, they had a whole code in the way they used to — and then they'[imitating nervous laugh] "Why then, we don't have to do that any more." The Foreign Service Inspector Corps had come through Cairo at that time and said that they saw more surveillance of the people in Cairo than they'd seen in the Iron Curtain countries that they'd been in.

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*Q: Just getting PNG'd must have been stressful. Getting evacuated must be stressful. And even though all this had happened before you took orientation —*

KOTULA: This is the history of the Service. I mean, this has been happening since the very beginning of the Foreign Service. And yet there was no way of dealing — I mean, I didn't even know what stress was. And neither did anybody else there, I don't think. I mean, you never talked about stress, there was never anything on "Stress." In Antananarivo, Madagascar, I think probably one of the things that led to that, probably added to my feelings of isolation there, is that my husband and I arrived in Madagascar after half the embassy had been PNG'd, so we were very much in disfavor.

*Q: Why were they PNG'd?*

KOTULA: That's another whole long story, I'd have to check my facts. And even though we were only there ten months, we were there during the overthrow, the coup started by the Malagasy students. We lived right behind the embassy, about six blocks from downtown; and I can remember one Saturday morning sitting in my living room hearing the machine guns firing.

*Q: So, what is the classic way that the Foreign Service deals with stress?*

KOTULA: You just stiff upper lip and "that's the way it is." There's this dualism again. You know, "this is the way it is" and a number of people in the Service say, "Oh, this is exciting, this is why I joined the Foreign Service, this is where it's at, this is where the action's happening." But there is an opposite side. They don't deal with the real terror and how frightening a lot of this is. How can you say... there's a stuffed feelin (she laughs) — I'm out there waving the flag, I'm showing the best there is of our country, and you're not "allowed" to have feelings of being scared to hell, you're not allowed to own the negative parts of it.

*Q: And nobody gives you any help in interpreting them and working through them?*

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KOTULA: They give you help fixing you up after yo(laughing) fall to pieces, but- (she trails off in laughter).

*Q: And you feel that perhaps something should be done in wives' training courses or other training courses-*

KOTULA: I think that would be an excellent place to [discuss] a lot of this. Now, I think since the establishment of the FLO office, the Family Liaison Office has been moving into some of this but so slowly that it'— I think, at least in my conception, everyone in Honduras that helped kind of make a space in the embassy for [help during this] period; now there's someone in pay positions but that wamy understanding of one of the purposes of the Family Liaison Office, you know, to kind of keep an eye on what the problems are and help in different areas where help was needed and organize that help and bring to Washington's attention the problems going on.

There is a vehicle there, that's one vehicle that more could be made of. There's a huge need for wives and families to have more orientation about — I mean, the State Department put us through the terrorism thing. Well, that doesn't handle the stress, for me, of being under — how can I say it — they prepare you to be aware of being mugged or kidnapped or sho(she laughs) but that's different from being psychologically prepared for living this day to day to day. I think a lot more could be done and should be done. Every place that I've lived overseas, I've lived behind bars on windows. I've lived in places that were high-crime, except in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. I had bars on my windows because I lived above the consulate but nobody else did because there was no theft there. All the other places I've lived it's always been a constant. You couldn't leave your house alone, you couldn't do this, you couldn't do that, there was always the threat of being broken into, robberies. And there were security problems from time to time.

*Q: That was another source of stress?*

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KOTULA: Yes, that was always another source of stress for me. But I was used to this. That's one of the things about life overseas, one of the things that I haven't liked about the Service at all. You know, you're just expected to live this way, it "goes along with the territory." When I came back to the States in 1980, that's the way it always was and that's the way I felt about it. We were here for four years. When we went out, the one thing that both my husband and I were struck with, that really bothered both of us a lot, I went overseas thinking "well, I have to stack the bars behind the windows and I don't like this." And I verbalized this as "something that I'm going to have to work out and maybe if I'm vocal about it (she laughs) I'll feel better." Before we went to San Jose in '84, I went to a couple of the newest terrorist things they were giving, thinking, "Oh, boy." My husband and I knew people personally that ended up in Iran during that problem and were some of the hostages there; so I knew it's a very real thing. But we went back overseas and it was really oppressive to both of us in those four years, the security.

*Q: And you think maybe they should do more in helping you deal with that.*

KOTULA: Yes. Because I can remember both Chris and I talking to a lot of people at post o'how [they] had been treated and there was a huge difference in four years. And yet we'd always lived under [constant] security.

*Q: And you felt it got significantly worse in that four-year period?*

KOTULA: Maybe it's paranoia. I'm just throwing the word out there but it's part of the feeling that I got. The threat's there but the threat of the threat became almost a paranoia.

*Q: Because of the Iran situation-*

KOTULA: Because of a number of things that were going on.

*Q: At what point did you have your child?*

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KOTULA: Well, after going to Egypt, and Ankara, then Dhahran and Antananarivo, I had Kerstin when I was assigned back here to Washington. She was born in '73.

*Q: So you had several posts without children, and then you had had —*

KOTULA: Several what you'd call really pretty hard hardship posts.

*Q: Would you like to talk some about what it's like having a child overseas? Some of the advantages and disadvantages?*

KOTULA: I think having a young child is really good. I think there are a lot of advantages to it. The disadvantage all the way through is that you're cut off from your family. That's the disadvantage in bringing up children overseas. If you're overseas for three years at a time, and come back to the States for three years, it's somewhat different. My experience for most of the 23 years was overseas. Basically I only had two State-side assignments — well, three because I was here the ten months my husband was in [Vietnam] — I don't know whether that count (she laughs). That's difficult. The good part of what happens overseas is you make yourself surrogate family relationships. I think that's a good thing, a needed thing, because you are isolated from your family. The children grow up and don't see their grandparents very often, they don't have that feeling of family. That's hard for children. When you get to school age overseas, then you get a few more problems, depending on where you are, because you don't always have the best education. I think enough has been documented on that (she laughs), but “that's the way it is.” And especially in developing or third-world countries, whatever one's terminology, it's a problem. You just don't get consistent enough education for your children. You can't get that because there isn't an available pool of teachers qualified to teach, and especially not at a salary of \$4,000 to \$5,000 a year, which a lot of these teachers are still paid.

*Q: Is that anything you think anything can be done about? Or do you think that's like the bars on the windows —*

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KOTULA: The bars on the windows. "That's the way it is."

*Q: Do you think people are aware of that before they have children and responsibilities? Or do you think it would matter? Or is it just a tradeoff?*

KOTULA: I think it's a tradeoff, that most people accept. I don't know what the solution to that is.

*Q: Is there anything you'd like to see the Department doing to support families with children? Anything you think they could do along those lines?*

KOTULA: I think they have made some really good improvements, as much as they can along those lines. They have become more liberal about education away from post, and visitation things back and forth; that helps. Perhaps there could be more things, I haven't done much thinking along that line.

*Q: You mentioned that your daughter had some problems with alcohol at the time that you were in Costa Rica. What do you think was behind that? Was it something specific to the Foreign Service, and how was it dealt with?*

KOTULA: Alcohol is a big problem in the Foreign Service, I think. (laughing more heartily than ever)

*Q: Just for children? Or for everybody?*

KOTULA: Everybody.

*Q: And why is it a particular problem in the Foreign Service?*

KOTULA: Well, okay, I've mentioned the amount of stress that people can be under. At times, extreme stress. I can go down the list of all the posts I've been to. At times, depending on what was going on, there have been times when — there's always more

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stress living overseas than there is in the States, that's the way it is, and especially for wives and families.

*Q: Why is it especially for wives and families?*

KOTULA: Because the wives have to — they do this horrendous moving and reestablishing themselves, and there's no way to get around that but it's like you leave everything you have from one post to another or established. If you have anything personal of your own, you leave your friends, but if you have a career, that's a big area. If it's not in the embassy, if you're not part of a tandem couple, then there are problems there, too — continuing making your career, going post to post with your husband that can carry your career upward instead of parallel.

*Q: But if people like you have a completely independent career, then you have to uproot all that.*

KOTULA: I have to uproot all that. Throughout the Foreign Service I've had hundreds of people say, “Oh, it's so wonderful you have such a portable career.” Yes; that is true. However, that is another complete flip side of the coin — the fact that I have to reestablish a market every time I move. And in the number of times I've moved, that gets extremely tiresome and difficult to do.

*Q: You're not just painting, you're selling your paintings.*

KOTULA: I'm selling my paintings. I can paint all day, but at one point, if I have a “career”, that means she makes money with it, and you sell. And it takes a year to establish a market. In essence that's what I've found, whether I'm overseas or here- (end of tape)

Well, for instance, I can see there have to be all kinds of creative ways that a monetary award can be given to women for the work done. It doesn't necessarily have to be a huge salary. One of the big problems is retirements, retirement credits. You can earn Social

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Security credit and have your separate retirement. There could be some creative thinking along that line, there certainly could be some jobs where maybe the salary wouldn't be greater, there might not be any salary, but I think money could be paid to reach the minimum amount of Social Security credit for that year. Or if it's strictly voluntary work, make more of an effort — some effort has been made at posts — at documenting this volunteer work in women's resumes that they want; I mean real documentation.

*Q: From the ambassador or whoever is sponsoring her work.*

KOTULA: Exactly. But make it a more formal process. Because a lot of women are afraid to ask for this, or think, "This is stupid, the ambassador's busy running the embassy or doing his job and waving the American flag, he doesn't want to document my —" Well, make it more black-and-white, so that more women will say, "Well, this is my right."

*Q: There would be more routine. As soon as you do something, you'd put it in and get your points.*

KOTULA: Exactly. Make it very routine. A lot of women have problems feeling comfortable about, say, "Would yo(she laughs) document my record?" So yes, make it more black-and-white, more routine. There must be a number of other ways to do this, I don't know.

*Q: To get recognition and credit for the kind of work you do overseas, the necessary work.*

KOTULA: And, again, I think — now, this can be part of stress management too, a whole area of stress management. I'm still going back to the biggest thing, one of the biggest things that happened in the Foreign Service while I was overseas was real indoctrination into stress effects and how it could be managed. And that could be done here in Washington and that could be done at post.

*Q: But don't you think that getting some recognition for one's contributions would help reduce stress?*

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KOTULA: Yes! That's a big stress-reliever for women, that's right.

*Q: And you wouldn't feel so dependent on your husband's identity.*

KOTULA: The older a woman gets overseas, and the less she has of herself, of her own career, she starts to get more and more feelings of “My gosh, I'm getting in my 40s or in my 50s, and if I'd been elsewhere, I'd have had a career like such-and-such now, (laughing) but I don't.”

*Q: That contributes to one's feelings of stress.*

KOTULA: And the older a woman gets in the Foreign Service and the less feeling that she's had an accomplishment in her own field, or also the more her husband rises in the embassy hierarchy so that more and more she is the consul's wife, she is the DCM's wife, she is the ambassador's — she doesn't even have a name (laughs) —

*Q: And ironically, there's less of this when you're more junior.*

KOTULA: Oh, yes, a lot less of this. And I had — there were obviously a lot of receptions in San Jose, Costa Rica, that included visiting Congressmen or high-up specialty people in the Department of State, whether it be whatever agency or department— USIS, or the Bureau of Consular Affairs. And there were a number of women who would come through from time to time from Washington, whether with Congressmen or from the Department of State or some other agency. Coming officially or accompanying someone, what have you. These were high-level receptions. I don't know how many times in a year, vis-a-vis women visitors, one of them would ask me, “Oh, and what do you do in the embassy?” And I'd say, “No, I'm a professional artist. My husband is So-and-so.” And that would be the end of that conversation, and it would be very clear what I was thought of. You know, like, “You don't count!” (both laugh heartily) I can understand, but it just adds to your feelings

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of being a non-person. You get that feeling from men, but I think I've got that feeling from women a lot more.

Q: *Really?*

KOTULA: Yes.

Q: *Especially people from outside the community, visiting people?*

KOTULA: Yes. Women on Congressmen's staff who were visiting with the Congressman. I didn't get it from female Congresswomen. I did get it from women working within the Department of State or other agencies who were visiting. Several of them, I recall, were working for the U.S. Information Agency.

Q: *You think perhaps they could be educated a little better? (she laughs)*

KOTULA: I don't know how you'd get over that. But that's just another thing that adds to the feeling "my God, I'm not a person."

Q: *"I don't fit into the embassy, therefore I don't exist."*KOTULA: *Exactly.*

Q: *It must be particularly hard to take when you're working so hard for the embassy at the same time, giving the reception and —*

KOTULA: I don't think this is something I've made up but again I would see wives who were working as local hire in the embassy at no matter what kind of job, very minimal or quite interesting to have, part-time or full-time. There are a lot more of them now and I can see why a lot more wives want to work as local hire, even if it's a very menial job with hardly any pay, because they get treated better and — wives say this — they're "in with the action," they feel more important-

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*Q: And then they don't have to go through the stress of reestablishing their career with every move as you do. And if they've got a record at one embassy, I would think that makes them more employable.*

KOTULA: Yes, it makes them easier to hire in the next post they go to; sure. And now there's a large percentage of embassy wives who do that. But what about the wives that don't want to take secretarial jobs or don't want to take something that doesn't fit into any of their skills or any of their desires?

*Q: Of course, the Department should be delighted that there are those of you who are doing careers outside the embassy, because if everybody works in the embassy, there aren't going to be enough jobs to go around.*

KOTULA: (laughing) There aren't enough jobs anyway for the number of women. Especially now with Gramm-Rudman there's a cutback on jobs. I do think the Department has made as big strides as they can — some women might disagree— but there have been big strides in kinds of employ for women who want to work. Some women might say yes and no, but I think huge strides have been made along that line. Obviously, there could be more improvement.

*Q: Do you think the embassy could do anything to help people in your situation who have professions but don't work inside the embassy?*

KOTULA: I don't know, I really don't. I don't see how it can be a manageable problem. You can get jobs within the community. I know, when we were in Honduras, I really ran the art gallery. It was in the bi-national center. I was on the board of directors and also did all the arranging and hanging and all of that of the exhibits. But that was a volunteer job. You can get in universities, you can teach if you're an artist or writer even without a teaching degree. But these are outside jobs.

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Handling stress; and actually paying women to do jobs that are within the area of entertaining —

*Q: Those are the two big recommendations.*

KOTULA: Hosting wives of CODELs and visiting officials around, their wives, their families, their dog — (both laugh). And if perhaps it's deemed an important job, some kind of payment for work in women's clubs. I don't know why you'd ever do that, but there are ways that would take the stress off other people who don't want to do that.

*Q: Right. And then the people who are doing it would enjoy it.*

KOTULA: And there are an awful lot of women who do thoroughly enjoy that. Except that they really enjoy it so much that they put all their time in it and they can't help but resent women wh(laughs) and that's what happens.

*Q: But if they were being paid, then they wouldn't.*

KOTULA: I don't think they would. And they'd be less prone to do that.

*Q: And that would relieve stress all the way around, because then there wouldn't be so much pressure and resentment among the wives.*

KOTULA: One area that's not going to be relieved is the jealousy o(long pause) wives' jealousy of other wives. You know, this jockeying for position. “My husband does this-and-that and if you husband looks like a threat to my husband” — you're not going to get around that.

*Q: But don't you think there would be less of that if the women had their own jobs and identities?*

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KOTULA: Yes. What I'm trying to say is you're never going to erase that feeling entirely but you are going to help relieve some of that if women have more of a sense of their own identity. And with that identity has to come recognition of what they're doing, whatever they're doing is okay and it's good and it's needed and it's okay for them to do.

*Q: Right. Even if it's not doing representation.*

KOTULA: Yes.

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### BIOGRAPHICAL DATA:

Spouse: Kirk-Patrick Kotula

Spouse Entered Service: 1966 You Entered Service: 1966 Left Service: 1989

Status: Spouse

Posts: 1966-67 Cairo, Egypt 1967-68 Ankara, Turkey 1968-69 Morristown, NJ (while husband was in Saigon, Vietnam) 1969-71 Dharan, Saudi Arabia 1971-72 Antananarivo, Madagascar 1972-74 Washington, DC 1974-76 Ciudad Juarez, Mexico 1976-78 Tegucigalpa, Honduras 1978-80 Asuncion, Paraguay 1980-84 Washington, DC 1984-89 San Jose, Costa Rica

Spouse's Position: 1966-73 Communicator 1973-78 Vice Consul 1978-86 Consul 1986-89 Consul General

Place and Date (optional) of birth: Pittsburgh, PA, 1943

Maiden Name: Ruth Ann Ensley

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Parents (Name, Profession):

Carl L. Ensley, Prudential Insurance (now Real Estate Investor)

Alice L. Ensley, housewife

Schools:

Mount Lebanon High School, Pittsburgh, PA 1960

Ashland College, Ohio 1960-64

Carnegie Institute of Technology, Pittsburgh, PA, Summer 1962

The Cleveland Institute of Art and Western Reserve, Cleveland, Ohio 1963

Fairleigh Dickenson University, Madison, NJ, 1964-65

BA, Fine Arts 1965 and almost equivalent degree in Art

Earned last few credits (at graduate level) for full certification at Newark State College and Monclair State College 1966-68; K-12 Art Education

Date and Place of Marriage: Cairo, Egypt, December 21, 1966

Profession: Art Teacher and Professional Artist

Children: Kirsten Kim Kotula (1973, Washington, DC)

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:

At Post: Dhahran, Saudi Arabia Contract to inventory and refurbish furniture at the consulate Dhahran, Saudi Arabia Taught art at the Dhahran Academy Antananarivo, Madagascar Taught English to adults at the Bi-National Center Juarez, Mexico;

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Tegucigalpa, Honduras; Asuncion, Paraguay; and San Jose, Costa Rica .Cost of living report for consulate Tegucigalpa, HondurasArt director, Art Gallery, and member, Board of Directors, Bi-National Center Asuncion, ParaguayTaught art part-time and did workshops for teachers, "Art as a Learning Tool" Turkey, Honduras, Paraguay, and Costa RicaGave numerous talks and lectures on different aspects of art, art history, current trends in art, and aspects of painting and design to various groups and organizations

A lot of volunteer time in various women's clubs, damas diplomaticas groups, FLO offices, entertaining at embassy functions in all posts

Exhibited and sold paintings overseas since 1967

In U.S.: 1965-67Art Teacher in Chester, PA, Public Schools 1973Contract work at the USIA in Education Research, project on American Architecture 1983-84Co-director of Springfield Art Guild Gallery in Springfield, VA 1981-83Show Chairperson and vice-president of Springfield Art Guild 1980-84Very active in art guilds' volunteer activities in Northern Virginia, including the Art League 1982Conducted workshops for teachers on "Art as a Learning Tool," Fairfax County Gave private art lessons intermittently over 20 year period Since 1965Exhibited and sold art

End of interview