

## Interview with Sue Whitman

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Foreign Service Spouse Series

SUE WHITMAN

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi

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*Q: This is Jewell Fenzi on Friday, March 9, 1990. I'm interviewing Sue Whitman at her home in Washington, DC. I've come principally to talk to Sue about an experience she had in Karachi, Pakistan in 1955-58 on the organization of Embassy wives, and also to talk to her about the role she played in the preparation of the draft of the 1972 directive for release.*

You had started to tell me how Personnel got involved in the 1972 directive.

WHITMAN: The State Department Personnel office had heard nothing about the directive. They were called one afternoon by AID Personnel office, which said, "How is it that you people are approving that directive?" We had not seen it. So we scrambled around to find a copy. It had been approved by Mr. Macomber but had not reached the Personnel office.

Both State Department and AID Personnel were in a state of shock over rather confrontational language in the directive. I was assigned to work with Mary Olmsted and Jean Joyce, the two people who we knew had had considerable to do with the directive. When we called them down to our office to review the directive with them, they were quite understandably very annoyed. They had worked this out to their satisfaction and Macomber had approved it. Who was this low level in State Department Personnel who

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was challenging what was being said? [Jean Joyce recalls working with the narrator on the reappointment of women Foreign Service employees after marriage. She believes her involvement with the '72 Directive was limited to cheering on her friend and neighbor, William Salisbury, who was one of the principal drafters. Mary Olmsted referred all queries about this era to Jean Joyce.]

*Q: What was your position in Personnel?*

WHITMAN: Personnel Policy.

*Q: It doesn't sound (she laughs) very low to me.*

WHITMAN: It wasn't very high. I worked together most of one afternoon with Mary Olmsted on one side and Jean Joyce on the other, going over the directive word for word. My attempt was to tone it down so it was not so confrontational. I lost track of what happened after that but my boss (she laughs) met me in the hall several days later, perhaps a week later, relatively soon afterwards anyhow. She was as white as a sheet because (laughing again) it had just been announced that Mary Olmsted was now the Director of Personnel! So she was our boss. This is the kind of thing people have nightmares about in the Foreign Service! And it happened to me.

*Q: Carol Laise was Director General at that time?*

WHITMAN: She came quite a bit later and I had nothing to do with women's directives or what happened in the women's field from that initial experience with Mary Olmsted until Carol Laise was appointed Director General. I had known her in UNRRA days, and when she made the rounds of the Department to see who was in Personnel, there I was (she laughs) in the basement level. She thought that I was the right person for a task force she was forming which was going to make over Foreign Service personnel policy, and she wanted me to represent the Civil Service. I had been hired in the Foreign Service but I took the examinations to qualify for a Civil Service appointment.

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At that point, when the small task force was founded to make some fairly substantial changes in personnel direction in the Department, I was, as I say, the Civil Service group's representative. I'm not quite sure of the date here, but it happened very shortly after the Carol Laise appointment, for which there would be a record; I'm rather poor on dates. I then got back into the women's lib problem in the State Department because at that point the women were coming directly to Carol Laise, and I was assigned to see what I could figure out about the situation.

This was a difficult spot to be in because the women were trying to cultivate me to assist them in their presentation to Carol Laise, and on the other hand the word from her office was "be very cautious and very quiet and say nothing and do nothing."

*Q: This was the group that led to establishment of the FLO office?*

WHITMAN: I'm not sure. They were concerned about women's rights in the State Department, I don't think it was about the AAFSW Forum report. I wrote for Carol Laise a statement of what I understood their position to be, what their problems were in the State Department. This was fairly soon after Carol Laise came on board, whenever that was. I was not allowed to show this to the women themselves but somehow a copy of it came to them and I was told that they approved the statement, that they felt it was an accurate representation of problems of women in the Service.

*Q: I thought I had a copy of that but I don't; I have a copy of something much earlier, in 1971.*

WHITMAN: The person who was the leader, as far as I kne(interruption of phone call, then resuming). I drafted a statement for Carol Laise which was an attempt to tell her what the problems were for wives in the Foreign Service as the wives' group now were interpreting them. And this piece of paper did get to Hope Meyers, who said that she approved the

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statement, that in fact it was a good statement of how the Foreign Service wives felt. I had nothing more to do with the wives' problems in the State Department. That ended it.

*Q: So what I need to now find is that document that must have gone back to her over Carol Laise's signature?*

WHITMAN: I don't know. It was from me to Carol Laise and I don't know whether it leaked to them or not. It was supposed to be held Secret, because Carol Laise was unsure of her position with these wives; this was a brand-new problem as far as she was concerned. She was not basically sympathetic. Like many people who are very successful in their careers, they're not necessarily sympathetic with people who haven't been so successful. Women like her didn't find that being a woman had handicapped them and could not see that it was a handicap otherwise. Carol wasn't sympathetic initially, but she tried to get a handle on what the problem was.

*Q: Somebody was sympathetic, because the Family Liaison Office (FLO) was established. These were just the nascent efforts to get some sort of liaison between the Department and the families and it happened rather quickly. This must have been around 1976 and the FLO office was established in 1978. So someone in the Department moved with record speed to do that.*

WHITMAN: Wasn't Joan Wilson involved in the FLO office?

*Q: No, she was involved in the Overseas Briefing Center, and that of course is in the Department, at the Foreign Service Institute, and that is the organization that now briefs people before they go out to posts — all sorts of people; it's over in Rosslyn in one building, along with the post reports and little boxes of all the material from posts. That's what the Overseas Briefing Center does.*

The FLO office is located in the Department building as you enter on C Street and then turn left immediately, after running that gauntlet of machines that buzz because of your

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keys and whatnot. They have an educational counselor, they take care of evacuations, education, employment; if someone is getting a divorce, he/she goes there. I think people who don't know where to go for an answer go to the FLO office, which, hopefully, either takes care of them or refers them somewhere else. Joan was involved in the training. The first person to take care of the FLO office after its establishment in 1978 was Janet Lloyd, who did a lovely job and is now director of admissions at Holton-Arms School, I believe. So what you were involved with, really, was Carol Laise's response to the women on the very first effort at getting the FLO office established.

WHITMAN: And there was a large meeting of women — there could have been 35 women there in her office; that was the first, I think, confrontation between the State Department and the wives that I knew of. I wasn't involved in anything else.

*Q: That could have been either before or after — it was probably before the Forum report. The AAFSW Forum issued a report stating the concerns and the need, because at that point the perception was, probably true to a certain extent, that the relationship between the State Department and the women had been fractured by the '72 directive. It really had.*

WHITMAN: It was very sad. Well, as I say the Personnel office had not been involved before, nor was it involved after that directive. They just dropped the whole thing, they didn't regard that as part of their responsibility.

*Q: Well, because wives aren't their responsibility.*

WHITMAN: They weren't. Well, they did get into problems later, particularly problems of equity for wives who had been divorced when the second wife received all the benefit and the first wife had served for 25 or 30 years. That was taken care of in 1983. But while I was there in the 70s they began to be involved in such a problem but they tried to brush it off, they didn't consider it their responsibility. That's why we didn't follow up on it.

*Q: And was it really a Personnel responsibility?*

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WHITMAN: I think it certainly was. They should definitely have been involved. But I noticed, after Mary Olmsted was appointed as head of Personnel, there was published in the entry hall to the Department a statement that this group, this ad hoc committee which I believe she had headed, had been given an award by the White House.

*Q: And which then became the Women's Action Organization.*

WHITMAN: But we didn't look into it because as I said we dropped our interest in it immediately. But it seemed to me, in just glancing at the list of committee members at that time, that those women were largely single women employed in the Department, not wives; I'm not sure if that was the case but it was certainly my impression. And that the wives were really taken by surprise by what was being done for them tha(she laughs) they didn't necessarily want to have done for them; that they were sort of written out of any responsibility in the Foreign Service when they felt that they were doing useful work and were very happy to be "two for the price of one"; that they were not feeling hurt by that.

*Q: You're absolutely right. One of the things that the Women's Action Organization became the watchdog for abuses at post. I have some letters written by Annette Buckland, who was later president, to various admin officers telling them that their protocol directions for the Embassies were not in line with the '72 directive. And I thought it was very interesting that WAO took care of that, because obviously the ...*

WHITMAN: Personnel office should have.

*Q: Well, I would think so. I mean, if you're going to hand down a directive, then the Embassy should follow it.*

WHITMAN: And she is not a government employee. It has no right to levy any duties on her.

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*Q: That is the tone of that original document (the pause to look for the document and Whitman's draft) which went out at one point over Charles Thomas's signature.*

WHITMAN: We obtained a copy of the original draft, it never was sent to us, we obtained it after we heard about it through AID Personnel, who were very critical of the draft and asked why in the world we were approving it. At that point we realized we'd never seen the draft and raced around, got a copy from Macomber's office; and were told that the people in charge of this were Olmsted and Joyce. So these were the two women whom we called, saying "We would like to talk to you about this draft." And they were as I suggested earlier understandably annoyed that Personnel was getting into this now, when they had it ready to go and approved by Macomber.

*Q: (looking at the draft they located) Does that have Macomber's approval on it?*

WHITMAN: "To all Foreign Service Posts: Joint State/AID/USIA Message. Drafted by the Open Forum Panel" whatever that was. This was not what that was called. Initially it was called an ad hoc committee, I think.

*Q: Those are two different organizations. Jean Joyce and Mary Olmsted were members of the ad hoc committee. The Open Forum was a group that used — Charlie Thomas was chairman of the Forum. Now this draft went out over his signature.*

WHITMAN: A lot going on, that the Personnel office knew nothing about and took no interest in, unless forced to.

*Q: You see, the one you're reading now reads much better. (Whitman concurs)*

WHITMAN: Were these two groups in conflict?

*Q: No, they were working together.*

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WHITMAN: Then why were they sending out two messages?

Q: *(laughing) I have no idea.*

WHITMAN: It seems a little odd. It must have been confusing to the field.

Q: *Well, I think only one message went out to the field, and it included USIA and ...*

WHITMAN: Well, this is exactly the same as this General Statement of Policy.

Q: *So the one you're reading from came out of the Forum.*

WHITMAN: "Wife has NO representational duties or responsibilities." And "to entertain .... representational requirements do NOT fall equally on all officers ... who freely choose to assist their husbands and in so doing make a valuable contribution. However, the U.S. Government has no right to insist or expect that a wife do so." (she continues to review wording of the document to herself, as a refresher)

Q: *So, you see, bit by bit the pieces are falling into place for us.*

WHITMAN: (laughing) Well, I'm not sure I'm helping you with it.

Q: *Oh yes, you are.*

WHITMAN: It's all the same. Anyhow, social gatherings in the past have sometimes been treated as if there were wives who wished to participate.

Q: *Some of it is but some of the language is softened a little bit in the draft airgram with Charles Thomas's signature on it.*

WHITMAN: How did the men get involved in this?

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*Q: Because, as Rick Williamson said on his tape, the women didn't know how to do it themselves, so they went to the Ad Hoc Committee, which sent them to the Forum, and that was the platform that they used. I call them "the young Turks." They were young officers — USIA and State — whose wives were so offended by management bulletin No. 20, the one that the "traditional" wives put out. So what I really need to know is who those traditional wives were, and how they put out a document like that in 1972, — no, it was 1971 — considering that Betty Friedan had written *The Feminine Mystique* nine years earlier, Gloria Steinem would establish MS a year later; the ERA Amendment was sent to the States for ratification and the *New York Times* headline said women are of two minds about "lib", they want better status but they aren't sure they want to go all the way with lib. And how in an atmosphere and an aura like that a group of State Department wives could put out that document which I gave you a copy of — the one about the representational duties — is just rather extraordinary to me, really. It just doesn't seem to be in synch with the times at all. It was the thing that led to this, (indicating various papers) and that led to thi(Whitman laughs), and this led to ... (they pause to shuffle copies)*

*Q: Let's go back now to Karachi, which was your third post, 1955 to — [date not given]. If you don't mind repeating it, that would be splendid.*

WHITMAN: I thought that the experience we had in Karachi was extraordinary, because it was very much a hardship post at that time. It really had nothing to recommend it. It was terribly hot, there was no air-conditioning, there was a housing shortage, there was no place to go, no shops in which to buy anything. It was just a desert. One thing that recommended Karachi was that Pakistan was a new country and they were very open and supportive and willing to meet with Americans. They often entertained Americans in their homes and so forth. From that point of view it was an exceptionally good post. Otherwise it was quite a hardship. Nevertheless for many of us who served in Karachi, it was one of our greatest experiences, and a post we enjoyed most, because we were all so involved.

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My husband was Deputy Director of AID and Economic Counselor of the Embassy. He almost always wore these two hats.

*Q: And you wore two hats too as a consequence.*

WHITMAN: And at that time the thing that brought us all to life was the fact that Americans were pouring into this post. The State Department staff increased somewhat, the AID staff increased enormously. There was also a MAG Mission, a Military Assistance Mission, which began its activities at that point. There was also a Harvard group which was supposed to help Pakistan with long-range planning.

So day after day these American families with their little children were pouring into Karachi and no provision, really, made for it. This was before the date when State felt any responsibility for education. If we wanted a school, we'd have to make one ourselves, and they didn't feel very much responsibility for anything (she laughs) about coping with the post.

It was not leadership on the part of the Department that pulled this mission together. I think Ambassadors' wives really knew almost nothing about what was going on at post. I say that because after school started, when we were all so deeply involved, our Ambassador's wife scheduled morning coffee. When there was no wa (laughing heartily) the Embassy wives involved in the school could take time off for Morning Coffee at the Embassy. I think the Ambassador's wife really didn't know what was happening at the mission.

People who took responsibility, actually, were David Bell, head of the Harvard group that came in for long-range planning. Parenthetically, he was at one time head of AID, I think after the Pakistan experience; he was also head of the Budget Bureau and a natural leader who didn't hesitate to say "let's do something at this post quickly before the whole thing falls apart."

He had brought two children with him, and there was a whole group of people all of whom had two or three or four children. They realized there was a serious problem at the post

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which they had not anticipated, so they were eager to put together something quickly. So we put together a school, including a high school. We started from kindergarten on. The other person who was very helpful was John O. Bell, head of the AID mission. He realized that there was an important problem here.

The school was a great experience for most of us and there were a great many people from all walks of life who served in it. But what really happened in the post is that the wives, realizing that this situation was really going to fall on their backs as much as on anyone if there were to be any school at all, just informally interviewed everyone who arrived at post. We wanted to know something about them in depth — what kind of people they were, what they had to offer, what they thought they were going to get out of the Foreign Service, what they liked to do, what would interest them at the post to do, etcetera. Each of us, whenever we met these people — and we made a point of meeting them all — tried to find out who these women were and what they had to offer, and then to guide them into something at the post because so much needed help. It was not only the school but a lot of other problems.

So the majority of women were involved one way or another. If not in the school, we told them about the refugee camps — people who were medically oriented, had social service connections, and so on really got involved deeply in those terrible refugee camps, where there was no water, no food, no medical services, nothing. It was a terrible situation. And many of these women mixed up the dry milk in their washing machines and took it out to the camps. Also, anybody who had any medical background at all gave medical services. There wasn't enough water in the camp to wash off the sore before you put a Band-aid on it; it was miserable.

Many people who day after day, week after week, year after year helped in the refugee camps tried to ameliorate the situation. There were others who got interested in what the Pakistani women were trying to do in promoting crafts. The Pakistani women had opened a shop — a brand-new idea on their part — and were trying to develop new kinds of crafts

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the villagers could produce that would be saleable. The American women who had had an entrepreneurial experience helped them establish these outlets in the village and the shop itself, and tried to give guidance on what kinds of things would sell.

Then there was another small group of women who through some personal connection — say, they met the head of the museum at a dinner party or something of that kind — got involved in doing over the museum in Karachi. The museum was located in an old English church in the park. Nothing had happened to it — you have to remember that the nation of Karachi was by then eight years old and museums were not of top priority, but two women with help from several others, I think, really made over that museum. They made it very attractive . They used some of the new fabrics the Pakistani women were trying to develop and sell. They found in the church building all the relics, things that were museum pieces. They educated themselves on Pakistani archeology and became quite experts. They produced, really, in a very quiet, very low key, never mentioned kind of way, a charming museum which hadn't been there before.

*Q: I have to ask you, in all these volunteer efforts, did they work with the Pakistanis, or did the Pakistanis just accept our ...*

WHITMAN: No, they were working always with Pakistanis. The refugee camps were run by the Pakistanis, so they worked with them. The crafts shop was all Pakistani except for some American women who were married to Pakistanis and living in the country; there was a group of them. In the school, we were working exclusively with Americans. In view of the problems we had, we did not invite anybody else to join in the school. We had enough problems of our ow(laughing heartily) without anything else. We had no Pakistani teachers, we were just using the women who were at the post at the time. I think those were the major projects.

*Q: But interesting ones, really.*

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WHITMAN: Well, I thought so. People were so involved in what was happening in Pakistan, what was happening in the school. It was not self-centered involvement just with the post or just with post families. That happened with the school group, but otherwise people were deeply involved in what was happening in Pakistan and trying to move it forward. It was a very stimulating time, and the friendships we made there have been lifelong friendships. I think the friendships you make are the people with whom you work, more so than in social connections and so forth. If you work together then you become good friends. Remember, we've just had another "Pakistani Party" — we've been talking the 50s and this is 1990! Once a year this Pakistan group tries to get together, 40 years later. These were all teachers in the school, came to know each other so well, like each other so much.

*Q: I think, having served at six posts, I think that your leadership — and it must have been the DCM's wife's leadership — must have been largely responsible for this, if the Ambassador's wife was a bit removed.*

WHITMAN: DCM had nothing to do with it.

*Q: But the leadership comes from the top.*

WHITMAN: It doesn't. That's what I'm saying. Leadership came from off center. It came from David Bell of the Harvard group. It had nothing to do with the post. As a matter of fact, David Bell's group were quite sticky in not wanting to be involved with the Embassy group at all. They didn't want to be seen as Embassy parties, they didn't participate in Embassy parties. They felt that their strength would be their independence of the Embassy in long-range planning, so they never were involved. But they were a very intelligent, very interesting group of people.

The DCM's wife was involved with a totally different group. In Pakistan there were minority peoples. Zubin Mehta the symphony orchestra conductor is a member of one such group,

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I can't recall its name. This is a minority group in Pakistan which was very influential. They had money, were highly educated, owned the hotel and the movie house, and so forth. The DCM's wife was very much involved with that group, which was another important area though it was largely social. She was also, I think, involved in the arts/museum project, not taking any leadership role in the school.

You see, it doesn't really work the way you assumed. It was a spontaneous thing from within the group itself. It was just the few wives who got the school started. We undertook to be sure that we could pick up for the school everybody whom we needed and who had any talent for the school, then we incidentally led them into other directions if we couldn't use them in the school. This is really what happened and it had nothing to with ambassadorial or State Department leadership.

*Q: It's interesting that this is the second example I have recorded of leadership coming from, as you say, off center. That wasn't really a crisis situation in Pakistan but it could have been one if the women hadn't had anything to do, and hadn't been involved. It would have been horrible.*

WHITMAN: It was terribly hot. We had one air conditioner for the master bedroom and I think we were rather privileged. When we left two and a half years later other families were getting a little air-conditioning, but there was absolutely nothing to do and no place to go. And yet, it turned out to be everybody's favorite post. Just because of involvement.

I think this is what's so seriously lost now. There isn't any feeling, or I don't sense any feeling, on the part of the wives that involvement is the way to go. You're not supposed to be "involved," you're supposed to be concerned with your own individual careers, what you were doing back home. You don't necessarily see a post as an opportunity for new ways of involvement, new things to learn, new experiences to have. I don't sense that there is much emphasis on that now.

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*Q: Still I sympathize with the wives in two respects. When one looks at the cost of housing, and the cost of educating children now, and competing in a two income world, really. Most of the bright young couples in Washington, like our bright young Foreign Service people, who are here all the time, they both have careers, they have two incomes. And you need it.*

WHITMAN: You do. And so they're feeling oppressed all the time because they don't have the second income abroad.

*Q: Yes, I think they must feel a little out of the mainstream.*

WHITMAN: Oh I'm sure that's true. I was struck not so long ago in meeting a lot of young Foreign Service wives at a party: you say that they're out of the mainstream at home but I felt that the Foreign Service offered the most extraordinary opportunities.

*Q: Oh I did too.*

WHITMAN: Extraordinary opportunities. I met this nice young woman who had just divorced her husband. He had been head of the CIA in Iran at some point — this is quite a while ago — but she felt that she had been very much imposed upon. He was always bringing home people from lunch unexpectedly, always asking to have lots of entertainment in the house, and so forth. She felt she was just being imposed upon. So I said, "Tell me, what are you doing now?" "Well, " she said, "I'm working for an S&L in Bethesda." Now she's in the mainstream! (she laughs heartily) But the difference between her life as wife of the head of the CIA in Iran, and living alone and working for an S&L in Bethesda — (she breaks up) I would say was quite considerable. And I don't really understand why these women don't see that when they have enormous opportunities to see the people who are leading the world, who are making changes in the world, who are affecting policy, and they can entertain them in their own home. And they have a

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chance to know their wives, come to know their families — that strikes me as being quite “mainstream” itself. This little job with an S&L in Bethesda ...

*Q: I don't understand that myself.*

WHITMAN: I don't know, I think there has to be a positive look at their opportunities in the Foreign Service. I'm talking about spouses now, their opportunities in the Foreign Service, new learning opportunities, new participation opportunities, new this, new that. And make it a very positive thing. I think we've been put on the defensive for a very long time and that we shouldn't be on the defensive. You don't have to oblige them to give tea parties and coffee parties and things. If they want to do that that's fine, but somehow emphasize that they are a part of the picture. What has happened to them now is they're not part of the picture, they're totally out of it. Nobody expects anything from them, nobody's going to ask them to do anything, they can just sit there and talk to themselves for the next four years. And they're in very bad shape because of that. I think you have to find ways for involvement.

I couldn't think how to end that thing and it's not ended properly now, but somehow the post has to emphasize opportunities for involvement in those countries and I'm not sure how that would work.

*Q: The reason I asked earlier about the great involvement in Pakistan and the women working with Pakistanis is because there are some countries that don't want us to volunteer.*

WHITMAN: Oh yes, there's not question about that.

*Q: And then that puts the woman in a real bind, it really does. And then of course what they're dealing with today that we didn't deal with is the fortress mentality because of security.*

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WHITMAN: Which is awful, just horrible.

*Q: And I would question in a situation like that, should they really be there? If there really is a security risk, maybe it would be better — it would certainly save us a lot of money — if we just sent an Officer over on an 18-month tour and not subject the families to that.*

WHITMAN: It's possible...

*Q: And it could be that things are changing because of communication and Fax-in (she laughs) — I mean, you can get a written document from here to there in seconds now. Maybe we don't need all of that representation abroad.*

WHITMAN: It's possible.

*Q: I hate to think that that's the case, I'm not endorsing that at all. Because I think we did a great deal in our traditional role. We did.*

WHITMAN: We did, we did a tremendous amount. And it's still there to be done, I think. I was in Yemen last summer. The more primitive country you could not find, it does not exist. So what was happening? Well, we went to the Embassy parties and there gathering night after night were the same women who were allocated to a room because most of them were Arabic and they didn't want to mix with the men. The women were all there talking to each other night after night, except for some of these Arabic women who really didn't have anything to talk about and you could just sit by their side in silence. You could see how deadly a post that could be.

The husband of my next door neighbor is the Ambassador and she does not go to the post. She stays here instead, and has a job, although they don't exactly need the money, but however, she enjoys it more. On the other hand, here was a group, all their children were in this school — an international school I guess it was — so they sat around in evenings talking about how bad the school was without ever making a single gesture to

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do anything. They were driving the Ambassador right up the wall because they would fuss, fuss, fuss about this school. He was so mad he was about to close it, (laughing) he felt if you don't like it, do something about it. There was just a feeling of sort of inertia. Somebody else was supposed to do what was needed to be done about the school. It must be somebody else's problem, especially the American Ambassador. What was he going to do? The whole Diplomatic Corps was coming to these parties — we went to two or three of them and you could see the same people coming night after night, and all of their children were in this school, the only school there was. So, there are still opportunities for involvement. But they would be limited, I would say, in Yemen.

*Q: I found at our last post that any wives who weren't employed felt that if they went out and did the volunteer work while everyone else was being paid, they were being taken advantage of. I wonder if that mentality doesn't exist now?*

WHITMAN: It very much does exist, very much. In this little paper I gave you, I give a definition of happiness.

*Q: I saw that. I think this is very good.*

WHITMAN: I think that the definition of happiness needs to be kept in mind. That's one reason, I think, that that money is never going to be satisfactory. It'll never be enough, it'll always be a source of contention, a feeling that it's demeaning because it's so little. "Back home what I could have done" — etcetera etcetera. So, although I'm not opposed to trying to get some money for these women, I don't think it'll solve anybody's problems or make anybody happier at the post.

*Q: How can you rate a wife? You can't rate a wife — the way to give her recognition was to have her in her husband's Efficiency Report and to say "yes she did" or "no she didn't." (she laughs).*

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WHITMAN: What was crystal clear to I think women in my era is that even though we were included in the his Efficiency Report, it really made no difference on your husband's career.

*Q: Absolutely! You're absolutely right. So you were just there for your own self satisfaction of having done a good job.*

WHITMAN: Yes, that's right. And being recognized for that. But it didn't make any difference in what happened to the husband.

*Q: None whatsoever. And if they were instructing young wives correctly, they would tell them, "Do it for your own self satisfaction. The only way you're going to have an impact on your husband's career is, you can harm it but you can't help it." And I firmly believe that.*

WHITMAN: I'm sure that's true. On that note ... I'm not sure what the answer is. I don't have the answer. I only know that happiness was achieved with involvement.

*Q: I think this will be good for an article either in the Foreign Service Journal or in the State magazine.*

WHITMAN: I'm not sure it's that important.

*Q: But it's interesting, the happiness concept.*

WHITMAN: Yes. And this man is quite famous. I went to a lecture he gave here recently. I was quite interested in what he said, because for me, that happiness has been involvement of some kind. Something that is so interesting for me that I do it for the sake of it rather than for the money that was in it.

*Q: "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?"*

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WHITMAN: (laughing) That's right. I've had a lot of interesting jobs. The job that I liked the most was something that was totally out of my field — being the principal of that school. I knew nothing about Education. I went down to the USIA library and just spent days there, I read every book on education the USIA library had imported, down one shelf and into another. I learned from that most of it is just trash we're saying about education. It is so flimsy, s(groping for adjective) unstructured, so poor.

*Q: But you administrated the school?*

WHITMAN: Yes but we were looking for standards for grades, for standards for arithmetic for third, fifth, ninth grade and so forth. You couldn't get that out of any of these books on education, they were full of garbage. Theory. So boring, and so useless. You know, if you were looking, if you were taking a teacher who'd never taught before and were putting her in charge of fourth grade, you jolly well had to come out at the end of the year that represented fourth grade at home so that the child could move to the fifth grade when he got home. You couldn't fool around with all this theory. You had to have something very substantial to go on. So we did find some things substantial to go on. And people who had never taught before found this one of the most interesting things they ever did. The money was nothing. \$100 a month we got.

*Q: But it was recognition, you see.*

WHITMAN: (laughing) Well, it was recognition. Nobody ever fussed about the money!

*Q: How did you become president of the Volunteer Clearing House, and tell me what's happened to it.*

WHITMAN: One of the jobs I had in the State Department, I was always writing pamphlets about one thing or another, and when Bill Crockett was Director General, he issued something that came to be known as "Crockett rockets." These were something somebody was supposed to do somewhere along the line. These left his desk an(almost unable

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to speak for laughing) frequently flowed from one desk to another until they reached bottom in the basement level. I would pick up on Crockett's rockets, there was no place else for them to go. One of the rockets was that we needed a "retirement book." He had seen something that had been issued by one of the departments which was "The Law and Retirement" or "You, the Law and Retirement," something like that. And he thought how interesting that somebody's doing something about retirement. So I picked up on Crockett's rockets because nobody else wanted to, that is for sure, and began to explore the subject of retirement — something that I had never thought about before. You could hardly believe it but in the 70s there was almost nothing written on retirement. Nothing! I went to all the libraries in town and you couldn't find any guidance or role model or anything else to follow. There was a woman writing a book in New York on the same subject. She and I commiserated with each other and she used mine and I used hers. In any case I produced this book, and it was a good seller so we produced it three different times. It was always the same pamphlet but we gave it three different names and we updated it. So that this project, this Crockett rocket retirement pamphlet, went on and on. And when I left the Department, they gave me a contract to rewrite it for the third time.

This gave me an opportunity to — but the emphasis in the pamphlet, again, was on involvement in retirement. What are you going to do with the time? What can you do that will be interesting? So I talked about all the kinds of opportunities that there were for retirees in employment, but largely also in volunteer work. So, I had talked to the Volunteer Clearing House and all these other agencies over the phone and never had time to go out and talk to them personally; we got all the stuff we could from the telephone conversation. But when I was finally retired, I thought here was a good chance for me to go around and really see what these places were all about.

*Q: (laughing) See if it's all I said it was.*

WHITMAN: Right. And one of the places I interviewed was the Volunteer Clearing House. They were just established: they had one desk, one telephone in a big bare room in that

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library that's at about 22nd and Pennsylvania Avenue. Just starting out, they were trying to put a board together, and one thing that happened at that point was that we had the first recognition for volunteers in the Washington metropolitan area. So they asked me if I would head that up, which was interesting.

I had never been interested, really, in volunteer work. My mother was very heavily involved in leadership ways in Chicago. She said, "Don't get involved in this volunteer work, you should work for a living." She really didn't even want me to be married, she thought it would be so interesting to have a career. "Feminism" didn't really start with Betty Friedan, it started with my grandmother, and my mother. They were very interested in independence for women and so forth.

So, I had not ever paid any attention to volunteer work. I was so amazed at what was going on in this city with volunteers. I was touched to tears, I couldn't believe the activities, the successes people had, the impact they were having on the society, the effect on change in social policy that these volunteers had. They saw a problem, just as my mother had, in her era. They saw a problem, they started a committee, they produced a program. In Chicago in those days it became a neighborhood project, it became a city project, then a county project, then a state, then became a national project when we got Franklin Roosevelt. This is how change occurs in the society, and I was suddenly thrown into with this Volunteer Recognition Day and discovered how much was happening in Washington.

So I was enormously impressed. Anyway, this was a connection with the Volunteer Clearing House. They were looking desperately for board members in order to form this organization, so they said, "You be Vice President" and I said, "Okay, I'll be Vice President." Very shortly after that the President decided she'd go back to work, so that's how I became President right away. (both laugh heartily) It was a very interesting experience. We were looking for funding, we got accepted by United Way, we developed a lot of interesting projects and programs. I found it a very interesting job, so I was in it for about six years. Yes, it's the happiness.

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Q: *We'll work an article out of this, just wait and see. (Whitman laughs).*

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SUE WHITMAN - MARCH 9, 1990

The March 1990 AAFSW News highlights the continuing frustrations among Foreign Service wives regarding their role in the Service, and their dissatisfaction with some of the proposed solutions, such as tandem couples, functional training, residence manager, unless paid.

Was it so different, I wonder, in the 50s when many of us felt blessed to be in the Service, though keenly aware of the State Department's then indifference to our status and negligible assistance in helping us cope abroad.

I wonder if the answer lies in a definition of happiness. And for this I look to Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the University of Chicago Professor of Psychology and Education, who has devoted his career to the understanding of life satisfaction. What makes it? Who enjoys it? He concludes that happiness comes from such deep involvement in an activity that nothing else seems to matter, an activity so compelling that one does it for the pleasure of doing it. Such an activity might be a challenging job or mountain climbing, bringing up children or learning snorkeling, a science experiment or building a house.

Involvement was surely the reason for the satisfaction many of us felt in Karachi in the 50s — a post which by any normal standards had few if any pluses and innumerable problems. It was hot, hot, hot with very little air conditioning. There were water and food problems. The shopping center was two blocks long. The one escape was the beach. But access to that crossed the open sewer leading to the sea. There was no place else to go.

The factor which changed life for all of us was the sudden huge expansion of the American colony for which little preparation had been made. The Embassy itself, a huge AID

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mission, a large Military Assistance Group, a Harvard group to help with long range planning, all poured American families into Karachi. Pakistan was then about eight years old.

The school was the major problem. There were 60 school age American children when we arrived, around 250 two years later. The State Department was not providing schools, or even money for education at that point. We were on our own.

We kept track of every arrival, and thus began the informal interviews to identify the talents and interest of every wife. Wives interviewed wives. What could they contribute to the post? What did they like to do? How could we trigger their involvement in Karachi?

The school we developed — kindergarten through four years of high school — absorbed the largest group of wives. Compensation was \$100 a month. Many had never taught before but were willing to try, had ideas of their own how to teach art, math, music, reading, hadn't liked the way it was done where they came from. The school used the Calvert system for the grades and a similar university based system for high school, so there were standards for every class every day. However, the intelligence, sophistication and dedication of the moms who were doing the teaching would have been hard to match anywhere.

For those who weren't absorbed into the school, there were innumerable projects which needed help. The refugee camps were appallingly short of food, water and medical services. A large contingent of women worked daily mixing dried milk in their washing machines for distribution in the camps. They helped the sparse medical personnel and developed social services.

Other wives interested in the arts joined a group of Pakistani women to help them with a shop the group had opened to sell Pakistani fabrics and to develop saleable crafts.

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Others helped redesign the Karachi Museum, using the new Pakistani fabrics, researching the artifacts they found scattered around the church which housed the museum. They themselves became experts in Pakistani archeology.

Still others made successful efforts to know the Pakistani women who were involved in family planning, education, social services and health, and introduced them to the rest of us. The new country of Pakistan was eager to learn and to move ahead in every direction.

This self activating post influenced the children who themselves devised numerous programs with minimal adult assistance — a school year book, snack shop, style show, art projects and a Christmas pageant using live camels and sheep and a nomad tent on a piece of the desert near the school. The need for discipline and psychological problems was rare.

It was the absorbing involvement of so many in community projects in Karachi that led to high morale at the post in the 50s.

I am not sure how this relates to present day foreign service life. Does each post explore and formalize opportunities for involvement? Is the focus on the needs of the embassy family or on the community at large? Is recognition given to wives who make a significant contribution to the community? Which of the proposed solutions to wives' frustrations qualifies for consideration under our definition of life satisfaction?

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### BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Roswell (Ross) Whitman

Spouse Entered Service:1951Left Service: 1962 You Entered Service:Same

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Status: Retired spouse

Posts: 1951-53Oslo, Norway 1953-55Tel Aviv, Israel 1955-58Karachi, Pakistan  
1958-61Cairo, Egypt 1961Tokyo, Japan

Spouse's Position: Counselor for Economic Affairs to Minister for Economic Affairs, Deputy  
Director, AID; Director, AID

Place and Date (optional) of birth: Columbus, Ohio 2/25/11

Maiden Name: McKeon

Parents (Name, Profession):John McKeon, Importer-Exporter

Schools (Prep, University):University of Chicago, 1932

Date and Place of Marriage: Chicago, 1933

Profession: Social Worker, Personnel Management

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:A. At Post: Principal, Karachi American School (\$125  
per month stipend)

B. In Washington, DC: Paid: Dept. of State, Personnel Management; Volunteer: President,  
DC Volunteer Clearing House; Chair, Citizens' Advisory Council, Iona House; Commission,  
DC Commission on Aging

End of interview