

## **BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index**

**GORDON, Pamela Jane, (née Taylor), b. 1951**

### Career (with, on right, relevant pages in interview)

Entry into FCO, 1973	pp 2-3
Rhodesia Department, FCO, 1973-75	pp 3-6
3 <sup>rd</sup> Secretary, Political and Press, Havana, 1975-77	pp 6-14
3 <sup>rd</sup> Secretary, UKRep, Brussels, 1977-78	pp 15-16
Difficulties of combining career in FCO with a family life	pp 16-23
Anecdote on Charlotte Rycroft and the lack of FCO maternity leave	pp 17-18
Special unpaid leave, Chile, 1978-83	pp 18-20
Resignation from the FCO, 1983	pp 20-21
Diplomatic Spouses Families' Association, voluntary work, 1986	pp 21-23
Diplomatic spouse, Paris, Warsaw and Burma, 1987-99	pp 23-28
Return to diplomatic career, 2000	pp 28-31
Deputy Desk Officer for Nigeria and Benin, FCO, 2000-03	pp 31-32
Special unpaid leave, Vietnam, 2003-07	pp 32-36
UK Delegation to the Council of Europe, 2007-10	pp 36-40
Desk Officer for Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, 2011-12	pp 40-41
Chair of the Diplomatic Families' and Spouses' Association, 2012-17	pp 42-48

## **BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME**

### **RECOLLECTIONS OF PAMELA GORDON RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY CATHERINE MANNING**

*Copyright: Pamela Gordon*

*Today is Tuesday 16 November 2021. This is the first interview with Pamela Gordon for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, Catherine Manning recording.*

CM: Pam, how did you come to choose the Foreign Office as a career?

PG: I think it was because my father was Air Force and we had spent a large part of life travelling, often overseas, with him in Cyprus, Germany and Singapore. First, I felt that travel was in the blood; I could never imagine myself staying stationary for any more than five years. Singapore had quite an effect on me because I was there in my late teens and I was interested by everything around me. I used to go into Singapore city and visit mosques, Buddhist temples and Hindu temples. It was just fascinating and I realized that was what I was most interested in: other peoples' cultures and lives. In particular, before I knew exactly what was going on, I was quite a fan of Lee Kwan Yew and read his biography by Alex Josey. That led me to read more about international politics. This in turn was probably the guiding principle behind my deciding that the Foreign Office would be a very interesting career, even though I was reading Law. My father was absolutely horrified and told me not to consider a diplomatic career when I could have a very good career in the UK as a lawyer. He was pleased when I applied for the Diplomatic Service and got rejected from the Fast Stream because it opened up the possibility of a legal career. I already had a place at Guildford to do my Part Twos and an article clerkship with some solicitors in Harrogate, our home town. But the FCO had suggested that I should try and go for a special Graduate Executive Stream entry, which had a limited number of places. I was always rather stubborn so he wasn't surprised when I persisted in trying the competition and finally succeeded and abandoned for the time being my legal aspirations.

There were only ten of us in the special Graduate Executive Stream entry that year. I did compromise with my father to the extent that I asked the FCO to defer my entry for a year to enable me to get my Part Two law exams. However, the FCO were not flexible in those days and insisted I would have to try through the open competition again if I deferred my place.

CM: Were there a number of women who didn't get into the Fast Stream to whom it was suggested that they should take the Graduate Executive Stream?

PG: Yes, 8 out of 10 of us who were taken on this basis were women; only two men; who were Oxbridge: the rest of us were from redbrick or new universities. We had all been told that there was a strong possibility that we would be transferred to the Fast Stream once we had had time to get a bit more experience under our belt, but, as far as I know, only two of us were and they were the men. As we discovered – we didn't know anything about this gender discrimination until we got into the Foreign Office – the Admin Stream entry that year, of which my husband was one, was actually seventeen men and one woman; the one woman was the daughter of the Head of the Diplomatic Service, who was very good and would easily have got in on her own merits. She was excellent, but the fact that there were seventeen men and one woman was quite striking to us women, used to a level playing field in our universities.

CM: Did they give you any training in the Graduate Executive Stream?

PG: No, we had remarkably less than the fast stream entry. I didn't really feel much difference between myself and Robert and his generation, because we were all doing the same political-type jobs in Foreign Office departments, until it became clear that Robert was being sent for special training for a couple of weeks but our intake were not going to get any of that. In fact, Robert and I did meet on a Security Clearance Course which was obviously compulsory for everybody, but I never got any more formal training than that. Anything that I did was off our own bat. I volunteered for Spanish training at one point and did that in my lunch hour. A few of us were chosen to go to New York for the UN General Assembly on a temp position, but for the rest, we simply had to learn on the job without formal training at all.

### **Rhodesia Department, FCO, 1973-75**

CM: Your first department was Rhodesia Department in the FCO where you were for two years. You just learned on the job?

PG: Yes, absolutely. I just landed in the Department and I don't think there were any other women there at that point. I was put in an office with a man called David who, by then, was a very jaundiced Second Secretary. Quite an interesting baptism of fire. We got on very well, but he was very cynical and desperate to get out of the Foreign Office, so perhaps not

the best person to be in a department with. I learned a lot from David; he eventually sailed his boat round the world to a posting in Brunei, which you could do in those days; you could take sailing time to get to a new post. I don't know what happened to him in the end. To begin with I was in the Passports, Citizenship and Refugees Section. It was Ian Smith's time and we were operating a Stop List, stopping listed people from coming into the UK from Rhodesia, particularly members of Smith's de facto government and its influential supporters and sanctions breakers but also a certain number of the freedom fighters, unless invited by us specifically. It was quite a difficult time; we had sanctions in place against Rhodesia. Rhodesia could have been the egalitarian hope of Africa, because they had a very educated black class there who could perfectly well have ruled alongside their white counterparts. There was seemingly much less animosity in Rhodesia than there was in South Africa between the races. We thought it could be a beacon of hope in Africa, but sadly by his extremism Ian Smith ensured that never happened. I wasn't there for the Lancaster House Conference: that all happened later.

There were some very interesting characters in Rhodesia Department and we were all in the political 'Third Room' together. People like Charles Drace-Francis, who I thought was just amazing. He was so good. He went off and learned GCSE-level Shona at night school so that he could communicate with the Rhodesia African nationalists. When they rang or tried to arrange an interview, he would talk to them and would greet them in Shona. We were all so impressed by that. He went to a lot of trouble to do that. Sadly, his career faded out later on; various problems happened and he fell out with the Foreign Office. He was very bright and I think that was one thing that really struck me at the time. The Foreign Office basically encouraged eccentrics in a way. We had people who were brilliant but unusual, who were not necessarily going to toe a line. They had their own views, very good alternative views that they could present. So I felt there was a very good balance in the Foreign Office then. They weren't a whole load of rule-bound bureaucrats; there were a lot of interesting people with interesting ideas, who were not afraid to voice them.

My other remit was to answer passport and nationality questions and any refugee questions. A lot of it was people ringing in and saying, 'I'm a Rhodesian and I want to get British nationality. My grandparent was born in England. How do I go about doing that?' We could obviously refer them to the Home Office Nationality Department, but we acted mainly as a filter at the beginning. There were all sorts of other questions about passports and nationality which we'd get sent over from Rhodesia. We had to try to help them with answers. Then

there were people wanting refugee status. Nationality issues were often complicated. I think I was probably given that job because I'd come with a law degree, so already had a pretty good idea of nationality issues. We were doing a lot of other things. I remember being told to go to Heathrow one day to tell somebody that they were being refused entry and give them the reason: they were on our Stop List. They would try to come in without a visa and were picked up because they were on the Stop List. People didn't necessarily know that they were on the Stop List. Some could guess why, because they were part of Ian Smith's Cabinet. The man I went to speak to didn't make a tremendous fuss. He probably knew he was on the List and was just trying it on.

I was doing that for about eighteen months, but then after that I swapped to the Sanctions Team. They were operating commercial sanctions; I don't remember very much about that because I had less responsibility. It was, of course, the time of the miners' strike and I remember being quite enthusiastic about only having three days in the Office and time in the afternoon to going skating & other activities. I loved skating at the time, but soon discovered no skating rinks were operating because of the lack of electricity. In fact, we discovered there was actually very little to do, so it wasn't quite as joyous as we thought it might be, having this extra time. Our intake was very close; we had a good camaraderie of young ones who had come into the Office, both the Admin and the Executive entry, we all intermixed and that was where I met Robert. We did quite a lot of things together; we went to the pub for lunch and for a drink after work. It was a very nice atmosphere, I must say, particularly when everybody else had gone home and we were still in the Office because we were working late or because we had something lined up for 8 o'clock. We would scamper back and forth on the magnificent grand staircase, between our respective departments. One of those young colleagues was Matthew Parris. There was quite a culture of long hours; not quite as much as in the Foreign Office when I re-entered years later, but still even at that stage we were doing quite long hours.

I was commuting from Northwood, living with my parents, who were in RAF quarters in Northwood, at the time. My father was in MOD, so just down the road, but I was always late back, after him. That was initially; then I moved into a flat in St John's Wood which was owned by somebody in the Foreign Office, one of our ambassadors – in Switzerland. He owned this very nice town house in St John's Wood, in Marlborough Hill, and he wanted a young Foreign Office person to live there on the top floor, which he'd converted into a sort of flat, but really just like going to the top floor of their house. The bathroom had been made

into a kitchenette for us with a baby Belling and we washed up in the wash basin. I shared it with another young woman who'd come in at the same time as me, Jan Huish. She and I shared; she had the bedroom and I had the living room and slept on the bed-settee. It worked very well; it was a very comfy place, with good heating. The only fly in the ointment was that we were supposed to keep an eye on the young son of the family, who was by himself while his parents were overseas. He was either at boarding school or university; he was seventeen or eighteen at the time. He was pretty wayward. Whilst we were there, he joined Hare Krishna and spent a lot of time parading up and down Oxford Street. He also spent quite a lot of time coming into our flat and raiding the fridge when he needed to. We got on very well; he was a nice lad, but a bit of a responsibility. The cleaner was meant to keep an eye on all of us, so she came in every week with an eagle eye and occasionally we'd get messages from the owners of the place to say that the cleaner was very worried because she'd found something worse than cigarettes - joints - lying around in Andy's section of the house and did we know anything? We had no clue; we were out all day at work and would very rarely cross with him. It was an interesting arrangement in return for which we had a very nice place to live, with only the use of the top floor, obviously.

### **3rd Secretary, Political and Press, Havana, 1975-77**

CM: Pam, in 1975 you were sent as Third Secretary, Political and Press, to Havana; that sounds a very interesting posting.

PG: It was. It was a difficult posting, but it was certainly exciting. I never knew quite why I was chosen for Havana, except that I'd done Spanish in my lunch hours, so I had a modicum of basic Spanish. The Embassy in Havana consisted of an ambassador, a minister-counsellor level deputy head of mission, and then there were two first secretaries, two second secretaries and there was me as a third secretary. There were also five administration clerks/secretaries and quite a number of local staff.

CM: Were you thrilled to be going there?

PG: No, I was horrified when I found out that there were no shops, only rationing warehouses and we had to import a large shipment of everything we thought we would need for a year - toiletries, food, clothing, books etc. Well, I was thrilled to start with - the Caribbean with its beaches and sunshine! To be quite honest, I had to look up exactly where Cuba was, but I knew all about the politics, because I had been a big fan of Che at university. I had the famous large poster of Che on my university wall. I'd read a few of his books on guerrilla

warfare, because my father needed them when he was in Singapore and was doing jungle exercises with the RAF regiment; he wanted to understand how guerrilla warfare operated, so they were all in our house. I knew what the political situation and I'd followed it. So I had the advantage there that I knew a bit about it, but needed to read up a lot more. But I think that probably was why it wasn't a happy posting, not at all. I went in full of idealism; I thought Fidel's government was the answer after the ghastly dictatorship of Batista's; the Americans were interfering too much - all standard text book stuff. I thought, 'Good for Fidel,' as far as I was concerned.

CM: And how did you react to the condition of the people when you found how things were in Cuba; was it relatively prosperous at that stage?

PG: Not at all, they were impoverished. I was horrified to find that my idealistic society was so opposite, the polar opposite, of what I had imagined and was really the reverse side of the coin to capitalism. Instead of the aristocracy, they'd replaced them with the Communist Party, in all its levels, the Politburo, the Central Committee. It was all basically the same sort of situation that we had in any capitalist country. There were class structures and the people who were outside the Communist Party had very little. This was very obvious in Cuba because of the rationing system which was in operation at the time. There was nothing: no shops or markets only distribution warehouses. It was a very soulless place, far worse, probably, than the Soviet Union at the time. Consequently, you knew exactly what your level was. If you were Politburo, you had a good chance of getting your children into the Stalin School, and you got into the special, well-equipped Lenin Hospital when you needed hospital treatment and went to special holiday resorts in Isla de Las Mujeres or private beach villas for the Politburo members. These were the places always shown to people who came round the country to see how wonderful Communism was. What they didn't know was that everybody else was going to an ordinary hospital which was far less well supplied and funded. I found the difference absolutely shocking. I had cause a couple of times to go into the hospitals and was appalled by the conditions there, but I had also been in one of the Communist Party hospitals and could see that there was a huge difference between the two and the levels of care. Also shocking was the schooling system which was so much in favour of Communist Party children: they went to their special school which, yes, had very good standards, but for the majority of the population there was no such thing. There's only one embassy couple left now from my time in Cuba; everybody else has died, sadly. here is only William, who was First Secretary, his wife Jill and myself left to tell the tale of what Cuba used to be like in

those days. We all still feel strongly about it. Because I was Political Third Secretary, I was rubbing shoulders all the time with people who were potential dissidents and right from the start you felt the repressive atmosphere, from the moment you set foot in the airport and they tried to open your case and you told them they weren't allowed to.

My welcome to my flat was a watcher standing outside, very ostentatiously taking photographs of me coming and going, not trying to hide themselves; it was basically a warning, 'We're here; we're watching you.' Then when my car arrived at the port, I was nervous about driving it back, and one of the Registry guys came with me to the port and drove the car back with me. We parked outside the house; when I left the next morning one of my tyres had gone completely flat. There was only one garage that diplomats and foreigners were allowed to use; you had to wait until they had time to look at your car. When they did, they said there was a nail in the tyre; it seemed to have been put in deliberately. A little reminder that you're here on their sufferance. I lost two more tyres in the same way, on consecutive days so when I finally got the car on the road, I was well & truly into the spirit of the place! I tried to say hello to the next-door neighbours, but they were too frightened to talk to me, as a foreigner. It turned out that my maid had her own channel of communication with them, a hole dug under the fence between their house and our house. They would pass messages to her and she would pass messages back. I'd get these sad messages when I was taking the diplomatic bag out to Mexico, 'Could you ask the señora if she'd get a pair of shoes for our child, because he's outgrown his and we didn't get any in the last rationing distribution because there were no shoes left when it got to our turn.' Or no toothbrushes left or whatever; every single thing was rationed. You knew you couldn't do that in case it was a trap. There were many cases of people being trapped that way – foreigners expelled or even locked up and the Cuban concerned arrested for 'fraternisation with foreigners.' Although your heart bled for these poor Cubans, you couldn't help them, both for their own safety and for your own diplomatic status. I suddenly woke up to how a really mad repressive regime can operate, which was terrifying.

Because Cuba was an island, all radio waves were stopped from coming in so we had no external radio at all, no way of getting messages – there was no internet in those days. You were totally cut off and totally reliant on the Diplomatic Bag. Every so often the unclassified Bag wouldn't come in and would disappear. It would finally turn up weeks later at the Protocol Ministry. 'Oh, it was mistaken for our Diplomatic Bag.' By which time it had been opened, everything had been looked at. The Confidential Bag was always taken out in person

by one of us and because of the really repressive atmosphere we lived in, everybody in the Embassy was allowed to go out with the Diplomatic Bag. Diplomats or spouses could go on the Bag run as a psychological break from the stifling repression. We all took it in turns and we went in twos. You had the Diplomatic Bag chained to you and you had a seat for it on the plane. You took it to our embassy in Mexico; it used to be to Jamaica, but Mexico was the nearest place for the Queen's Messenger (QM). Since the Queen's Messenger couldn't get into Cuba, you had to take the Bag to him. Originally we flew to Jamaica, but then Jamaica got quite dangerous, so they switched it to Mexico. We would take the Bag and would be met by the Embassy at the airport and be taken straight to the Embassy. The Bag would be placed in the strong room and then you were free. The QM would collect Bags and take them back to London. You'd be allowed to have three days in Mexico City. The freedom was wonderful; you'd go and buy an apple or a cauliflower or something you hadn't seen for a year. You never stopped talking in the absence of eavesdroppers.

We knew that our houses were bugged, so we never had proper conversations at home. All your papers had to be kept in the Embassy. Anybody who kept their bank statements at home was in breach of security rules. If you did keep anything like that from home, it would never be in the same order when you came back. Maids were paid through Cuban Protocol and they were under instructions to let people in who would be going through your things or replacing bugs. I would have this very interesting correspondence with Robert, my future husband, who was by then in Poland as Third Secretary Political. We would swap experiences by letter, but it would take six weeks between the two posts, each letter going back by Queen's Messenger and then coming back again. It was a long interval. I would describe conditions in Cuba and he would describe conditions there; he would say, 'Your conditions sound worse than Stalinist Russia,' and I would go back and say, 'And you sound as if you're living in a capitalist paradise'.

We never got to meet Fidel, because we were Enemy No. 1 in Cuba at the time, since the Americans were not there (the Swiss were representing them) and we were the next on the hit list. Fidel would never grace our National Day or anything like that. He once arrived in the Embassy and all the local staff were thrown into a great state of panic when he came up, by accident, to the fifth floor, which was the floor we were on. The Jamaicans were on the third floor and somebody pressed the lift button. Suddenly our poor receptionist, Andy, was confronted by Fidel coming out of the lift with all his guards around him. He said he practically had a heart attack. Fidel took one look at the Union Jack, turned on his heels and

left immediately. That was the close encounter with Fidel. I know in subsequent years he did start to come to see us for the National Day, but not in the time that I was there, which was probably the nadir of relations between UK and Cuba. We were only tolerated because British Leyland had continued to supply spare parts for the decrepit old buses in Cuba, despite the fact that there were sanctions operated by the Americans. No other spare parts could get into the country, but British Leyland continued to supply spare parts and we were tolerated for a while.

The only other encounters I had with Fidel were frightening ones. It would be the middle of the night, coming back from somewhere, when suddenly a car with its headlights glaring full on would be coming on the same side of the road as you. You knew, you were always warned, 'You have to get off the road, because that is Fidel. He always travels on the opposite side of the road and you get off the road as fast as you can, because he has armed escorts in front and behind and they open fire immediately if anyone gets in the way at all.' Fidel was constantly in fear of his life, because there were numerous attempts by the Americans to poison him and so he went everywhere like that. One couldn't blame him. In fact, when my Ambassador was first told he was getting a woman as Third Secretary, he said he didn't want me. I gathered from Personnel Department that eventually, reluctantly, he took me, because he tried to keep women out, apart from secretaries and registry. He didn't want any unnecessary women, because it was too much of a responsibility for him, he said. The last time they'd had a female diplomat there in the Embassy was eight years or so prior to me and she had been shot up on her way into the office soon after her arrival. She had been following a car along the Malecon, which is the main drag along the front in Havana, alongside the sea. The car in front of her, which turned out to be a Bulgarian diplomat, had overtaken a slow-moving convoy, this time on the right side of the road. He'd pulled out and she followed him blindly. It was Fidel. The guards immediately fired; he was killed, apparently – this is anecdotal – and she arrived at the Embassy with about eight bullet holes in her little Mini. She was unhurt, but it was a very scary experience. We were all told about that when we first arrived to emphasize that at night there'd be headlights coming at you, but in the day, the convoy might be on the right side of the road, going very slowly. 'Don't ever think of overtaking.' These were the lessons one learned within days of arriving that made the place terrifying from the start. But from my feminist; point of view, it could equally have been a man involved. The culture was a bit different in that generation and women had to be protected more.

The Ambassador was a very old-fashioned ambassador. I suppose these days one would call him misogynist; in those days I regarded him as a bit of a nuisance because he was so over-concerned with my safety and welfare, i.e. paternalistic rather than misogynistic. If I went off anywhere, I had to ring back every night, if I could, and assure him that I was OK, which I found very restrictive. It was a bit like having my father there. He did it with the best of intentions. Nowadays, of course, you would have little time for behaviour like that, but in those days you reluctantly accepted it as the quid pro quo for me being there. I think he finally had to admit that I could do quite a lot of good, because I was able to get permission to travel around Cuba for a week, reporting on local conditions, which was very difficult to obtain. You had to get permission from the Foreign Ministry to leave Havana, further than about 15 kilometres away, and you had to be able to prove where you were staying each night. There were only three or four approved State hotels which you could stay in and if one hotel mysteriously turned out to be full when you were going to be there, the middle hotel of an A-B-C-D route, then you wouldn't be allowed to go because you couldn't possibly get from hotel A to hotel C without stopping somewhere. You couldn't ever stay with a Cuban household; you were not allowed to mix with them, so that meant that people couldn't really travel freely around the island.

There were only three female diplomats on the island at the time: Lisa, who was the Finnish Chargé d'Affaires, Nancy Styles, who was a Canadian, Second Secretary Commercial in the Canadian Embassy and myself. We all knew each other very well and we formed quite a little camaraderie between the three of us because we were constantly being used as the supernumeraries for dinner parties when ambassadors' spouses were missing: we had to constantly fill the gaps in. Nancy was allowed to travel because the Canadians were in very good aura with the Cubans at the time as they were opening tourist resorts on all on the beaches. They even allowed Air Canada flights into Cuba. Nancy put forward a proposal that she went round the remoter parts of Cuba to look for the possible beaches which could be developed into beach resorts for tourism. She put me down as her travelling companion: that way we were able to swing it, going in my little blue Mini all-round the island. She was genuinely looking at the tourist potential of beaches; but I was interested in political information, picking up people coming out of the sugar cane fields, hitching a lift, who inevitably turned out to be dissidents or recently released political prisoners or local villagers who could take us to their village. We learned a lot about conditions there; we saw children without shoes in Santiago de Cuba and all the places far from Havana and that made me

realise that Communism didn't have equal benefits for everybody and the rural population were often impoverished. I wrote up a lot of this journey, which I sent back, finally getting the Ambassador's permission to do so, to the Department in London and got glowing praise from them. They said, 'This is wonderful. This is exactly the sort of thing we need to know. Now perhaps the Ambassador could do a similar trip.' But he was never able to do so, because the minute the Cuban authorities realised he wanted to travel to these places, they found ways of blocking him. I think that Cuban Intelligence thought that two young women in a bright blue Mini, probably unable to speak much Spanish, presented no threat. Big mistake! I wasn't regarded as completely innocent – I was constantly being found on the wrong road at the wrong time of day or night; I was told that they had later marked me down as the spy in the Embassy. Conveniently, I was the one who was followed most of the time. It was an interesting place to be and I had a lot more access than I realised, because of my sex and because of being young and single and was disregarded to start with and then rather more 'chaperoned' afterwards. But I was able to have a lot of meetings with Cubans, dissidents. After this journey on bad Cuban roads, full of potholes and often ending abruptly, my little Mini was in a terrible condition. The only garage allowed to repair foreigners' cars had a long waiting list. In despair I followed up a recommendation for a fellow diplomat and arranged to have the car repaired on the black market. I had to take the car to a village outside Havana. It turned out that the whole village was inhabited by ex-political prisoners and their families, who were seemingly 'outcast' from the rest of society. They couldn't find work as 'ex politicos' and as a result they weren't entitled to a ration card, meaning their families would starve. Most of them were working on the 'black' in order to feed and clothe their families. I got to know my mechanic and his family well in various trips to the village whilst he cannibalised parts of old cars to get mine back on the road. Needless to say, there were very few spare parts for any car available in Cuba, let alone the only Mini on the island! All Cuban mechanics were experts in refashioning parts from old cars, which explains how vintage cars are still running in today's Cuba. His description of his life as a political prisoner was eye-watering. Reported by a neighbour 10 years ago as saying that nationalist Cubans had not fought the Americans only to find themselves with another totalitarian regime when Fidel became Communist. Many of the heroes of the Sierra Maestra, such as Camille Cienfuegos were saying similar things and either disappeared suddenly in mysterious accidents or ended up in the Morro prison. He told me both his children had excellent school grades but were denied the university places they wanted to study medicine or engineering because with their father's background, they automatically failed the so-called 'political-

moral evaluation' test needed for university entry. They were offered instead tractor driving training. I learnt a lot from this man but was constantly aware that he was putting himself in danger talking to a foreigner. I insisted we talked in an open field, that and the sea being the only places in Cuba where you could talk freely. I think he knew exactly the risk he was running but needed to feed his family (I paid him partly in food) and he knew that if he was sent back to prison, his family would then be entitled to a prisoner's ration card. Sure enough, when a Swedish colleague later tried to contact him about repairing his car, he was told that he was back in prison for the crime of 'fraternising with a foreigner'. When I was told this several years after I had left Cuba, I was appalled and felt incredibly guilty. I hated Cuba even more after that.

It was a one-year posting because it was a hardship post, but the Ambassador wanted me to come back for a second year. I felt that if I got out of Cuba, I'd never want to return, so as a compromise I stayed on to do eighteen months. I think that was good, because I had learned a lot by the time I got to the end of my posting and I'd had enough of totalitarian regimes to last me a lifetime. In fact, I have been posted in others but none as effectively repressive as the Cuban regime was.

My Cuban Spanish was pretty good by the time I finished; Cuban Spanish is quite a special Spanish. One of my remits would be to listen in to local meetings of the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution – CDRs, as they were called – which were based on the Soviets in Russia. They were the eyes and ears of the Party among the people. They would have neighbourhood meetings and I would sidle along and squat down with everybody. One learned a lot that way. You also had to be able to follow Fidel's speeches in Spanish, because they would go on for six hours or so. We'd have a rotation, two hours each. How many times did he mention the people's Soviet whatever or the Socialist revolution and which way round was it? There was always a fine distinction in the way he talked about Socialism.

It was a difficult life for a young woman because you weren't allowed to date anybody, really, unless they were from a friendly embassy. I remember my male opposite number at the French embassy was reputedly having an affair with a dancer, in the Tropicana, which was the amazing night club-restaurant, which if you were very lucky you got tickets for. The average Cuban, non-Communist Party member, only got them if you were a 'destacado' worker, that meant a particularly worthy worker. If you'd done more sugar cane harvest than anybody else and you'd won an award, then you would get an evening at the Tropicana. As

diplomats we could go there frequently, which we did. I think my French opposite number had fallen in love with one of the local dancers. The French Embassy knew about the affair but turned a blind eye. We were all amazed; we weren't allowed to socialise with Cubans anywhere nor they with us, unless they were intelligence agents. She was clearly a honey trap, reporting to the Cuban Intelligence. Apparently, later he was brought home by the French government, not before time as we had a lot of information between us friendly countries that we didn't particularly want passed on to the spy in the camp, as it were. It was a very difficult place to be young and single.

CM: At that time did you have any thoughts about your personal future? Could you look forward to how your career and your personal life were going to work out?

PG: I think at that stage I was extremely keen on being a diplomat and having a proper career in the Diplomatic Service.

CM: And you just accepted the limitations on your social life – it wasn't like being in London?

PG: Yes, I did just accept them and I could see very good security reasons for them. The whole atmosphere was so terrifying. I did actually go out with somebody in Cuba, and I didn't realise that my Ambassador was actually aware of it, but there was nothing technically wrong with my boyfriend in that he was single, a diplomat from a friendly country, and that was supposedly above board. It was in a way quite a convenient relationship for both of us because we couldn't be blackmailed but we were very discreet nevertheless although we always knew that Cuban Intelligence would be monitoring us. But I didn't realise until just before I left the country that my Ambassador had known all the way along, which was why he often asked me to find out what the Middle East embassies thought about a particular situation – we would have tasks delegated to us for when we went to receptions - to garner the views of other embassies. So I didn't have a full social life, but let's say it was a limited social life. There was a lot of camaraderie in adversity among all the young diplomats, so we did a lot of things together. As for the long term, as far as I was concerned, I was on track to continue with my career. That job, - political reporting- apart from the ghastly atmosphere in Cuba at the time, was something that I really enjoyed doing, and it made me realise that I had got the right profession.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Secretary, UKRep Brussels, 1977-78

CM: The next step was to go to Brussels as Third Secretary External Trade in UKREP Brussels, which was then one of the two main pillars of British foreign policy, so you were being moved to an important area. Were you pleased to be going there?

PG: Oddly enough, no I wasn't. The Deputy Head of Mission broke the news to me and he said, 'I know, Pam, that you wanted to go to Europe next.' I said, 'Yes, a Spanish-speaking country in Europe i.e. Madrid' He said, 'Well, I have very good news for you. You're going to Brussels.' And I said, 'Brussels!' It had a bit of a reputation at the time as being rather boring; Brussels was going to be a lot of faceless bureaucrats. We were enthusiastic about the EEC but working in Brussels meant very long hours and often quite tedious work.

CM: I can see that the responsibilities you've listed: EEC-Swiss Watch and Clock Agreement, Non-Ferrous Scrap Metals and Multi-fibre Agreement (GATT) were very technical and dry in comparison with being shot at in Cuba.

PG: Exactly. Yes, it was certainly a come down from my exciting job. I was attaché to four first secretaries in the External Trade Department, and I was seconding them on most of their jobs, which were things like steel and the entry of Greece and Spain to the EEC. They all had separate responsibilities for the big subjects and I had these little discrete subjects for myself; then I stood in for them at meetings when they couldn't attend. It was very interesting work, but quite different, suddenly having to speak for the UK in multi-lateral contexts which I had never done before, on very technical subjects. But I was backed up by experts from the relevant London Departments. I had people from the Department of Trade and Industry coming out with their delegations. They would sit behind me on the experts' row, and I would obviously be the spokesman, getting briefing information from them behind me the whole time. It was quite a lot of technical negotiation, especially things like the Multi-Fibre Arrangement which was very important to us because we were negotiating such subjects as quotas on what quantity of shirts we were going to be allowed to export to places. That was very important at the time because the British government in power had a lot of MPs in Lancashire and the North where the cotton factories were, the shirt factories. It was very important to them what our quotas were from the point of view of employment (as well as votes!). There was a lot of pressure, and it was very technical, but you had the Department sending you briefing notes or often coming in person. So you had to be up to speed with your brief and be prepared to negotiate, often late at night. There was one French-Vietnamese

negotiator who would keep us up often very late at night whilst we were negotiating these quotas, in French.

Yes, I enjoyed it, as much as you enjoyed Brussels at the time. There were a number of us younger people there who went out together at the weekends when we got our breaks, but we rarely went out in the evenings because we were mainly working late. Certainly, there was a difficult decision to make when Robert came by and said, 'Come with me to Chile.' I said, 'No, you come here to Brussels.' The Foreign Office said, 'It's up to you to decide because there isn't a post for the other one in the other country. You have to make the decision.' They weren't very co-operative. In fact, I've leapt forward a bit. What happened was that Robert came out to Brussels on his way to Chile on posting and after three days we decided we were going to get married, because you had to do things in a hurry in those days. Once we'd been separated again on another long posting, we'd never have got together. When I told my boss, who was Rodric Braithwaite, he told me to think about it because I had been suggested for the post of the Ambassador, Sir Donald Maitland's private secretary and this would be an excellent career move. I was very tempted. I did talk about it with Robert, but then I concluded perhaps it wasn't such a good idea. I think it was probably a bad career choice I made at that point, but instead I decided to go with Robert, which I don't regret!

CM: The choices before you were clearly put to you by Rodric Braithwaite and you plunged to get married. Did you realise at the time how serious it was, or did you think, 'I'll be able to work; I'll do something else; it doesn't really matter.'

PG: Yes, that was my way of thinking. I didn't realise it was such a dead end; that it wasn't a career-enhancing move. We had been over to London and talked to Personnel Department and that was when we were told that there wasn't a job for the other one. I would have been going for the second secretary job, hopefully, in Chile, but Robert was going to be the Second Secretary and there wasn't another job. Why they couldn't find a job for Robert in Brussels, I don't know. There was the Embassy; there was NATO, but no, there was no job available anywhere. We couldn't be in the same mission, so it had to be in one of the other two missions. They were just incredibly unhelpful and that was the way the FCO dealt with female diplomats in those days. We couldn't be posted together and one of us had to take unpaid leave. It was up to us to decide who – they did give us that choice. Five years was the maximum of special unpaid leave (SUPL) you were allowed to have; that was made very clear.

CM: When you're young you think: five years – anything can happen; everything can change.

PG: Yes, and there wasn't really any choice between Chile and Brussels in terms of fascinating jobs. I had joined the Foreign Office to travel, not necessarily to Brussels. Chile, to me, with my Spanish, I just thought that would be a fascinating country. At the time I know I sat down and took into account the fact that I was still slow-stream and Robert was fast-stream. His career was going to do a lot better than mine, particularly as we did want to have children. I think I had given myself a maximum of one child (I have four) and therefore my career was obviously going to be a bit hampered by having a child at some point. Quite a few thoughts went into the process of deciding to go for Chile.

CM: You mentioned Charlotte Rycroft as a role model for married women.

PG: Yes, Charlotte was wonderful because she was one of the First Secretaries I was working to in External Trade Department. She was married to Nigel Wenban-Smith and must have been one of the earliest married female officers. The marriage bar was only lifted the year before I joined the Foreign Office and she was able to stay on as married. And nearly all senior women in the service in those days had had to remain single. I remember her telling me she was going to have a child at some point; she was determined to fit that in, but the Foreign Office had made it very clear that she wouldn't get special leave and if she had a child at post in Brussels, they couldn't spare somebody going on maternity leave (I think the FCO never considered themselves as having to comply with such things as maternity leave) so she would have to go back to the UK on posting to do that. She was absolutely determined that was not going to happen. After I left, I heard that she was pregnant and then I heard quite a long description of how she had managed to arrange it so that the baby was due in August, that therefore she was on leave anyway, because Brussels closes down in August. So she was fine for the first month as she was on leave and then as the Office had made it clear that she wasn't going to have any maternity leave, she'd come back to continue as First Secretary. She brought the baby and the nanny with her. She carried on breast feeding the baby and doing her job. The way she did that – I wasn't there to witness it myself, but friends who were there told me – was that she brought the baby into the office. If anybody came along the corridor, she would quickly put the baby in a filing cupboard; the nanny was hovering, waiting to be called if needed ready to take the baby off her hands. She had to get the feeding in; she had to therefore do it in the office. If there was an interval, the nanny

would take the baby away and walk it around and bring him back for another feed. If she had a meeting, I'm told she used to use the Danish interpreter's booth, because there was never any Danish interpretation but there was a booth for the Danish interpreters. If she did that, she was up in the booth and the baby was below the level of the window, so nobody could see the fact that she was feeding the baby at the same time as speaking into the microphone on behalf of the UK. Then the nanny would come to the booth and take the baby away. All of this is anecdotal, because by then I'd left and was in Chile. To me it was amazing that she'd managed to do that in defiance all the odds and of all the hurdles that the Foreign Office put in her way. Subsequently she very sadly died in a road accident in Canada. I heard she had been due to take up a London posting as head of Africa Department. She was such an amazing woman and quite a role model for the rest of us. An absolute pioneer. It's important that Charlotte is remembered because she really did help the cause of women in the Office.

### **Special unpaid leave, Chile, 1978-83**

CM: It was obviously an important moment when you made the decision to go with Robert to Chile with the difficulties that you met in the Foreign Office along the way. In 1978 you went to Chile on special unpaid leave. You hoped to get a job in Santiago.

PG: Yes, I didn't regard it as a complete game changer, because I'd carefully lined up a job working for a British insurance company. They'd taken me on as an admin trainee, a good post, which I thought would be quite good grounding for me in commercial work and would stand me in good stead when I returned to the Office. No sooner had I arrived in Chile and her future employer confirmed the job offer, when the Embassy Legal Adviser told me I wouldn't get the requisite Chilean work permit because diplomatic spouses were not allowed work permits in Chile. I talked to this company about this. They were very helpful and suggested ways I could be paid without being officially listed as being on a salary. But the Legal Adviser pointed out I would have to give up my diplomatic immunity to work for them, which would make it very difficult for Robert. The Ambassador was very against anybody giving up diplomatic immunity, so it was in fact effectively impossible.

CM: And none of this was apparent to you before you went there?

PG: No, I thought I'd got a job, so this was a tremendous shock. When we first arrived at the Embassy, we sat down with Robert's predecessor and his fiancée and the four of us had lunch together. Michael, Robert's predecessor, offered to take Robert into the embassy and his fiancée would take me to show me the nearest shops. That was when it really hit me that I

had lost my job and I was now consigned to being a diplomatic spouse, which I had always had a fear of being. I had heard awful stories of diplomatic spouses having quite a difficult time and come across very intelligent ones who'd lost their job and almost felt that they had lost their way in life, because they no longer had a role. In my case my worst fears were realised when within a few days the deputy head of Mission's wife had rung to welcome me and ask me to make a cake for the embassy bazaar!

CM: What was your reaction to this double shock, being sent to the supermarket and then finding that you couldn't take up your job with the insurance company?

PG: Well, I set about finding something else quickly. I thought I had persuaded the UN organisation ECLA (Economic Commission for Latin America) to give me a job. They had advertised for somebody with legal and government experience and Spanish-speaking to take up a job in the office there, which seemed to fit my skills well. I applied for the job, but the UN was incredibly slow about replying. Months went by. Then it turned out the job was going to be relocated - to Ecuador, I think. I remember going home and telling Robert that I could have the job, but it was going to be based in another Latin American country. He asked me if I would accept a job that meant we would be living apart having just got married. You have to remember that these were the days before internet and cheap travel. I did see it being done later by other spouses, but at the time I thought it was the wrong thing to do, given that I had only just got married. It seemed rather pointless at that stage and Robert seemed so upset at the thought of me going to live elsewhere. I said, 'I could come back every couple of weeks for the weekend,' but that wasn't going to be enough. So that was out.

I was asked to do some teaching of lawyers there, which I took on and gradually did more teaching work, all of which was unofficial really. The lawyers and their wives all turned out to be Christian Democrats, or most of them were, with the opposition at the time in Chile, which was very, very interesting from a political perspective. They knew very well that anything they said to me would be passed back to Robert whose position meant he was in charge of contacts with the opposition, which we weren't allowed to have, technically, so it became quite a useful stream of communication. I kept quite active that way, because I got quite into politics in my own right, as a teacher. There was a question once asked in Parliament about the number of people who'd been detained in a May Day demonstration. The Embassy had no way of finding out, so Robert passed it to me. In my next class I was able to feed into the class, 'Did anybody have anybody arrested in the May Day

demonstrations?’ One of the mothers in my group said, ‘Oh, yes, my godson was picked up.’ ‘Has he been released?’ ‘Oh, yes, he’s been released.’ ‘Has anybody else been held?’ ‘No, no, they’ve all been released now.’ So we were able to reply to this PQ as a result of that. They were really important contacts of the Embassy ultimately. In a way that sublimated my desire to carry on in the work that I was used to doing, though I was technically teaching, which I wasn’t qualified to do.

CM: Two daughters were born in Santiago, so you were making good use of the time from the family point of view. Then after four years in Chile you came home to London and your special unpaid leave came to end.

PG: They extended it, because Robert was extended for another year after the Falklands Crisis, until the end of the posting. It was probably just over five years.

CM: You went back to London in 1983, but the Foreign Office wasn’t very co-operative about a job.

PG: No, not at all. I went in to see what I was going to be doing next. I did say to them that I would prefer to work part time or job share. They said, ‘That doesn’t exist in the Foreign Office.’ I said, ‘Well, it should do, because Lady Howe, the wife of Sir Geoffrey, the Foreign Secretary, is Chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission and there’s no reason why we shouldn’t have equal opportunities. The rest of the Civil Service seems to have.’ ‘Oh, but that’s not the Foreign Office.’ They were very adamant that the Foreign Office didn’t do job-sharing or part-time working. However, if I did want to work part time, there was a post as an executive officer in the Home Office in Immigration at Heathrow, for example, where they did shift hours. That might suit me. I said, ‘I did not join the Foreign Office to do immigration work at Heathrow’. They said, ‘If you want to come back full time, you must let us know by Monday, because you’ve already had your five years’ unpaid leave.’ We interviewed a nanny who was working for another couple in the Foreign Office. She was a Norland nanny and was going to be massively expensive, but I really only wanted to have a proper nanny for the children; I wasn’t prepared to have a part time arrangement. We interviewed her, sat down and talked about it. I was asking her how she was going to bring up our children, because between us, if we were both working full-time in the Foreign Office, living in Kingston, we would be leaving at 7.30 in the morning and getting back at 8 or 8.30 at night and neither of us were going to see the girls. The Norland nanny made it very clear that she was not going to do any laundry and only cooking for the children, no house

cleaning, so on top of that we'd also have to have a cleaner and we'd spend a lot of our weekends doing housework, not having seen the children all week. We discussed whether this was really the way we wanted life to be for these children. I remember walking endlessly round Richmond Park, trying to come to a decision. That was clearly a turning point. I couldn't face it. The financial side of it was very significant. The Norland nanny was paid about the same as a Grade 9 in the Diplomatic Service and we worked out that we would have enough money left at the end of the month for a takeaway Chinese meal for two! My salary would go straight to the nanny and cleaner. It was a very difficult decision and I still think about it often. I am sure I made the right decision in the end, but sometimes you wonder.

When I look at the choices that my daughter, with three young children, has had to face, and a full-time, demanding career, there is no way out of it, as it were, but she can compromise; she can have an au pair; she does 80% of her hours, though she says in reality she does more than 100%, but at least she has Wednesday afternoon off. She can look after her son who doesn't have school on Wednesday afternoon in the French school system. She can leave at 4.30 to collect the baby from the crèche. It's just about feasible. Had I been faced with that, I'd have probably gone that way myself and I'd have kept my career going. It was much more black and white then: either I gave up everything or I didn't; one or the other.

CM: So at this point you had to resign from the Foreign Office.

PG: Yes, they said to me, 'By Monday morning you must have told us whether you are going to come back full-time or you resign. There is no more unpaid leave; you've had it. It's a maximum of five years.' In the end I had to resign. It was a very bad moment. My friend Isabel came round and we discussed it and looked at alternatives. We finally worked out I could retrain as a teacher, as a TEFL teacher, which is what I had been doing anyway in Chile, and that is what I did. I immediately went off to International House and did a part-time teachers' training course and qualified there and was able to carry on working, but not in my old profession. But I never gave up. I worked part-time, which was achievable with an au pair.

### **DFSA voluntary work**

CM: At that stage you did some voluntary work for the DSFA, the Diplomatic Spouses Families' Association, which must have been useful later on when you had a big role to play with Diplomatic families. You volunteered as an Employment Advisor.

PG: It was a volunteer position at the time, because the DSFA wasn't at that stage a company limited by decree, which it is now. It was voluntary, but you got your train fares paid, and you got a limited amount of baby-sitting money, so it was a way of having a break from small children and doing something work-wise. I enjoyed that. It was very interesting because you were with a group of women who were determined to change the situation, not just for female diplomats, but for women in general, spouses in the Office who'd had to give up many careers. So we're no longer just talking about women diplomats, but about doctors, lawyers, whoever they were, they'd all had to give up a career, because it was almost impossible to find a job overseas, unless you requalified. The only one really that seemed to be feasible was working as a nurse, maybe in an Embassy if it was big enough, or TEFL teaching, which most people ended up doing as one way of keeping a career going of some sort.

When I was in the DSFA, I was the youngest member at the time and that particular year we were hosting an EU spouses' conference. The Times wanted an interview about being a diplomatic spouse and was running a central spread on it because the conference was being held in England. They plumped on me because I had a career as a diplomat and had had to give it up and become a diplomatic spouse. I was one of about five people who were interviewed, but for some reason they decided to go with my story in the end. I suddenly found myself in the rather embarrassing position of knowing I was going to be in the paper on Wednesday (it was Wednesday 8 November 1986). I couldn't remember what I had said to this very sympathetic journalist – I'd probably given away all sorts of things and ruined Robert's career. I remember I was absolutely terrified and Robert had to tell his Head of Department who'd warned the PUS (Permanent Under-Secretary). In fact, I met the PUS at a reception some time later. He said, 'Congratulations. That was fine, your interview.' So I didn't do too much damage. It was quite a useful opportunity to comment on being a spouse in the Diplomatic Service. But we weren't unique in what we gave up: vicars' wives, Army wives, the Oil wives faced the same problems.

CM: During this period in London, you had resigned from the Office and you chose to prioritise your family. Did you have any regrets?

PG: I think I was always pining for my previous job. I always thought I would go back to the Diplomatic Service. Everything that I was doing was always temporary in terms of working. It was convenient being a trained TEFL teacher, knowing I could do that overseas. It was very convenient, but I never felt it was my full-term career. I never devoted myself; I should

have retrained to be a higher-level teacher, which I didn't do, mainly because I enrolled for the course and then discovered I was pregnant in Paris. I always felt it was my secondary career, despite all the odds. I always hoped that at one of these posts they would suddenly say, 'You can come back because there's a job,' but of course I was out of the Diplomatic Service. You can't just go in because there's a job.

CM: I think that is the point that Judith Macgregor made, that she managed to hang on by her fingernails and she was always on the books, even if she wasn't being paid. Let's move on through your non-FCO years. 1987-1992 you were in Paris.

### **Diplomatic spouse, Paris, Warsaw and Burma, 1987-99**

PG: Yes, I was in Paris. I continued to lobby the Foreign Office, but I had no status then and they never responded. I was teaching English at the British Institute in Paris and working for the Mairie of our little suburb in Paris in the context of the twinning arrangement with a town in the UK. I had four classes a week at the British Institute and two evening classes in Croissy for twinning. I would say it probably amounted to two mornings, an afternoon and two evenings a week, something like that. I built up more as I had more time. I generally had an au pair and we could manage the school shifts. At one point I had four children in four different places (crèche/maternelle/British school and the Lycée International) which was quite complicated: one had an amazing organisational problem at the start of every week, making sure that someone was collecting each child.

CM: In 1992 you left Paris and went to Poland when Robert went back as Head of Chancery.

PG: I once again approached the Foreign Office, but there was nothing. In the meantime, I was doing all the Foreign Office exams in order to maintain my level of language ability for a possible return one day. I did the Foreign Office Polish exam when we went to Poland and I taught English at the University of Warsaw, working in the Law Department. It was basically legal English, which was perfect, but the salary you were paid in those days was miniscule. I was also working in the context of a language training scheme which the Embassy was sponsoring under a special bursary system, by which we were enabling the key institutions to have English classes. I was taken on by the Senate to teach, not so much the senators, but all the senior administration of the Polish Senate. That was a very interesting class to be doing in the context of Poland at the time. Much later one of my students turned up as number three at the Council of Europe when I was working there, which was a rather nice reunion.

CM: In 1995 you moved again when Robert went to be Ambassador in Burma, a very exciting posting. You were working there as a TEFL teacher and you became great friends with Aung San Suu Kyi. Let's take both those aspects of your life there.

PG: Yes, I loved Burma, a very interesting posting. I usually reckoned to be working within three weeks of arriving in a post; that was the advantage of being a TEFL teacher. I've hardly ever had more than three weeks out of work. I was taken on by the British Council to start teaching in Burma, where there were very few teachers; I also qualified in Business English while I was there and as an examiner of English, for a test of English competence that you needed to get into university in England. We only had one examiner at the time in Burma, so we desperately needed a few more to examine all the people who wanted to go to study medicine, for example. I was never short of work.

Probably the most important thing I did there was to teach a monastery class, as a volunteer, making sure as many young people as possible were able to speak a certain level of English. It had up to three hundred students in the class. My students are still around, working in many diverse fields. When I visited Burma recently, I discovered that one of my students had become head of that particular monastery. You feel your influence went beyond what it would have done anywhere else. The students used my class as somewhere where they could pour all their feelings out about living under a military dictatorship, without having to worry too much. I'd do a word game with them when there were smaller numbers. We'd sit in large circles and play a game. It was a question of listening, hearing the word and then thinking of a word beginning with the last letter of the previous word, so there was a lot of skills involved. I would start with a word like 'car'; the person sitting on one side of me would take up 'revolution'; the next one would say 'now'; the next one would say 'when' and it would go on like that until I had to say, 'I think perhaps we've gone far enough now.' They were very clever in the way they got across their frustrations to me. I'd do the third-person conditional and I would say, 'Write me a couple of sample sentences.' Because I couldn't possibly take in three hundred exercises, I'd go round and look over their shoulders. They'd show me their book with a big grin on their faces: 'If we were a democracy, we would be so happy.' I would say, 'The grammar is correct.' I was very careful not to comment, because we knew there were military intelligence implanted in the class. Everybody would say when they left, 'See that guy who's just gone off on a motorbike?' He was the person the military had sent to spy on the class. It was a very interesting place to be at a sensitive time and you really felt that you were contributing to help the young Burmese.

When the universities were closed, I had the English classes from the universities at my highest level and I had local villagers, who had heard about these free classes and wanted to pop in and were complete beginners. It was totally open door, so I never quite knew who would be there and how many was I was going to have each week. I would do songs; there are all sorts of protest songs that you use in TEFL classes anyway, because people know them and you can do them together very easily. There were some I would have to stop at some point, like *Where have all the flowers gone? Where have all the young men gone? Long time passing. Gone to their graves every one. When will they ever learn?* Everyone would take up the refrain with gusto, because to them it was real; it was their political feeling; they were singing it for their own reasons. It was a very moving place to be. I think I was doing a better thing than I would have been doing in the Foreign Office. I felt I had more communication with people on the ground than the Embassy did and in a way that was an inspiring position to be in. It was a really fulfilling role in Burma, unofficial as it was. The twin aspects of the teaching, not so much the Council teaching, which was largely aimed at those who could afford to go to British Council classes – there weren't that many who weren't generals' children – and the free classes which did attract everybody else, as it were.

I met Aung San Suu Kyi when she came to the Residence to see Robert when he first arrived. I remember practising how to say her name properly with all the right tones. I was very nervous about meeting her, but I probably knew more about her at the time, when we were posted to Burma, than Robert did, because I'd always been fascinated by her: this lone woman standing up to the military government and being put under house arrest; her story was one that I had always felt was resonant. When I first met her, I remember stumbling out, 'Hello, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.' She waited until I'd got to the end of the long name and she said, 'Pam, just call me Suu.' That really started our relationship. Sorry, I must just pause for a minute, thinking of Suu's position at the moment, under house arrest again. We became good friends and I became a great supporter of hers and I really identified with her aims, as did most of the people in Burma. I just felt for her having had to leave her children and her husband to come back and take up the mantle of her father, Aung San. She was in a very difficult position, a very lonely position. While we were there she was under house arrest, technically, but they'd lifted a lot of the major restrictions on her, so there were certain places she was allowed to go to, the British Embassy was one of them and the American Embassy was another one. She was allowed to come to us, but she was escorted by a military vehicle. The boys would go and peer at the military outside the gates, trying to goad them

through the hedge. I was allowed in to see her quite a lot, which I would quite often do, just to go and have a quiet cup of tea with her, to talk about things, the children, England and her husband whom we had good communication with, because our oldest daughter was in Oxford at the next-door college to Aung San Suu Kyi's husband and was able to help Suu communicate with her husband. That was quite an important part, I felt, of what I was doing there. Our children got to know Aung San Suu Kyi well; when Michael, her husband, died, for example, she came to the Residence to be comforted and I think the children were very, very good at that point. They were adept at just sitting quietly with her and hugging her. You felt you had a bit of a role there.

A couple of times we've seen her since, she showed that we're not forgotten. We were invited to her seventieth birthday celebrations at her college in Oxford and when she was speaking to Parliament, we were invited to that. Then we were invited to Chequers for a lunch that the Prime Minister - this was Cameron - gave for Suu. So we saw quite a lot of her when she was on her English visit. Then we've seen her twice when we've been back in Burma briefly on holiday. The last time was in March 2018 when we went and saw her in Napidaw, when she was by then State Councillor. She greeted us as if we'd never been away; it was just wonderful to see her. I'm feeling very much for her now under arrest again and the ghastliness of her position at the moment. She is very good at looking after herself when she is under these sorts of restrictions. She has many interests. Whether or not she's been allowed to stay in her house we don't know, where she has her vital piano, and her well-stocked library of books. She is a very good Buddhist; she's into meditation and that is helping her a lot probably. It certainly did in her periods of house arrest. She has wonderful inner resources, but she must be despairing. She is a normal human being, with the normal range of human emotions, but, somehow, she manages to rise above that to be also a national figure. To give up so much for her people - few people could do what she's done.

From another point of view, being a diplomatic spouse, Burma was the worst of the times I had from the point of view of the children. We had two children with us at school there; one went back to England to school after a year and the second one went back after two years. The girls were already back at boarding school and that was terrible, because we were so far from them. We didn't have email in those days; we had no mobile phones. The only way of contacting them was by telephone, arranging with the house master that they would be by a telephone at a certain time. There was a five-hour time difference; it was extremely difficult to communicate with them and when we did finally talk to them on the phone, the phone

crackled, as it was bugged. The Foreign Office later allowed you to use your concessionary tickets for half term, but that didn't happen at the time and in any case, it was too far for children to come out for half term. It was really a tough time, I felt, and it was difficult for the children by themselves in boarding school in the UK while we were so far away and totally out of contact with them, apart from letters which took a long time to arrive.

Just seeing them off on their way back to school was difficult enough. There was no direct flight to the UK, so you had to put them on a flight, either to Bangkok or Singapore, where they had to change planes by themselves. You never quite knew when they'd got back, if they'd got back safely. You never found out until they were back at school and you were able to talk to the headmaster or headmistress. The girls once got stranded at Bangkok airport. They'd been waiting till midnight for the BA flight to take off and then they were taken off the plane, because there was engine trouble. The Queen's Messenger on the flight was collected by the Embassy and he took with him all the children from the Embassy at Bangkok. They protested, because they knew Francesca and Alix and some of them were at school with them. They said, 'There are two children here who are from the Embassy in Burma.' 'No,' they said. 'They'll have to stay on the plane. We haven't got them on our list.' We'd told them in the Embassy in Bangkok that our children were going through the airport and please make sure that the CLO (Community Liaison Officer) kept an eye out for them. They were then taken back into the airport terminal and were put in rooms where you could stay in the terminal, technically a hotel of sorts. They were left there and told that the next flight would be at midnight the following day, so they had the whole of that 24 hours by themselves with no luggage. Francesca was allowed one phone call which she made very early in the morning to say, 'Look, we're stranded here and we don't know what to do all day. We haven't any money.' We were beside ourselves; we contacted the Embassy in Thailand and said, 'Look, you've got to do something about these children who have been left at the airport; they're only fifteen and thirteen, girls alone in Bangkok airport.' Finally, they sent somebody out to collect them and they were taken back to the Embassy in Bangkok. They had no luggage and couldn't join the other children in the swimming pool. They spent the rest of the day there and were taken back to the airport and put on the flight with the other children. We made a big fuss with the Foreign Office and the DSFA were able to negotiate that if you had children changing a flight, you were allowed to escort them to the point where the direct flight was going from. From then onwards I was able to escort them to Singapore or Bangkok; stay with them; make sure they got on the right flight and if their flight was

cancelled, we'd go back to a hotel and I'd be there with them. That was an important concession.

### **Return to diplomatic career, 2000**

CM: Pam, we've just reached the important moment in 1999 when you returned to the UK and to the Diplomatic Service. This was the restarting of your diplomatic career. Your return to the Foreign Office is a very important subject. Would you like to explain how that came about?

When I returned from Burma to the UK, I was still doing a bit of TEFL teaching, this time in a private school, where my daughter was and I was also part-time employed by the DSFA. By then they had a paid position as Educational Advisor, so having had to deal with a lot of educational questions with my own four children, I was in quite a good position to be able to advise others on different schools. This job at the DSFA was useful because it enabled me to get back into computers. In the meantime, I was also doing a part-time computer course at Salisbury College to ensure I had some IT skills which had been neglected over the years. I quickly realised when I was teaching at that school that TEFL wasn't as interesting in the UK. I felt I really didn't enjoy teaching, in this case, private-school children who really didn't want to be there in the first place, mostly Chinese and Russian, who'd been dumped there by their families to learn English. There was one case of a Chinese girl with a suitcase of money which was to keep her going all year, to pay the landlady in Bournemouth where she had to spend every holiday, to pay the supposed guardian, who was based in Soho somewhere. The latter had huge lists of Chinese children, all of whom were his responsibility, none of whom he knew, so you could never get him to come to talk about educational decisions, because he was just there as a titular guardian. I found this situation horrific, frankly. I felt quite strongly about the ethics of the whole thing. At that point I realised that I really did want to get back to my old career. I had never really abandoned the thought that I might one day go back to diplomacy.

A wonderful opportunity came along. I was rung by Sheila Lyall-Grant; she was another person like myself who had been consigned to unpaid leave for a long time, but the next generation up from me. She'd managed to work her SUPL, a bit like Judith Macgregor, SUPL, maternity leave, keeping her career going in some form or another through two children. She rang me up and said, 'You might be interested in this: Baroness Scotland, the Foreign Office Minister, wants to know why there is such a gender imbalance in the Foreign

Office.’ She said, ‘We know very well what the answer is, those of us who were thrown out at earlier stages. She wants to do a tea for the women who were thrown out or for whom life was made so difficult that they couldn’t pursue their diplomatic careers.’ Invitations went out to several us, about forty, I think. We trooped back to the Foreign Office to have tea with Baroness Scotland and explain the problems that we’d encountered during our diplomatic careers and why we’d had to leave. There were a lot of people missing and there were only two of us who had the slightest interest in returning to the Foreign Office. Most people who’d left had found better jobs. They had not made the mistake of being married to a diplomat and they had married somebody who was based in the UK and had been able to get UK jobs. They were now doing very well in their second careers. One of the secretaries who’d had to leave the Foreign Office was now the head of the whole secretarial pool for NatWest. She said, ‘You want me to go back to the Foreign Office on that salary! No way.’ There were only a few of us who said that we would possibly be interested in going back, so Baroness Scotland insisted that Personnel Department follow this up.

We went and had interviews with HR Department, and it became very clear that we would be expected to return at the same grade that we left at. I said, ‘I ‘m not going to go back like that. I was on the point of being promoted; I had subsequently qualified as a teacher and an examiner; I had done all the Foreign Office exams in all the postings we’d been in. I am not going to go back to the position I was in when I was 21, fresh out of university. How about taking all this into account?’ ‘Oh, well, we can’t take these things into account because they really don’t contribute to your career prospects in the Foreign Office.’ I said, ‘What about all the exams I did, for example? Polish, French, Spanish, Burmese?’ ‘No, no, all that’s irrelevant.’ They said, ‘We can’t see any way forward to give you promotion, but there are some internal ADCs (Assessment Development Centres) coming up.’ An ADC was a two-day residential examination centre, where you did all sorts of tests, a bit like the tests you took to come into the Foreign Office in the first place, CISBE. They were being done at the time for people who were wanting to move from Grade 9 to Grade 7, or in old-speak, from third secretary to second secretary. They did at that point find my file in the Foreign Office files and did discover that I had indeed been recommended for promotion, fast stream promotion, in Brussels. They then allowed me to sit the internal ADC, but I think I was the first external candidate to do so. It was a plus point in favour of the Foreign Office after so many years of negative responses to me that I was able to go to this ADC.

I was given one week's notice and I had no idea what it was going to be like. The person who most helped me at that stage was Judith Macgregor, who was back as Head of Security Strategy Department. I'd linked up with her again as we knew one another on a personal basis. She said, 'I can give you a couple of lunch hours and sit and talk to you about what goes on and give you a little bit of practice,' which was fantastic. She gave me advice and tips and a little bit of coaching, just a couple of lunch hours, but it was enough to give me a bit more confidence when I went into the ADCs. Also, what gave me confidence was that I just thought, 'If they don't accept me, I shall just carry on and do my own thing. I'll carry on with my qualifications in TEFL if necessary.' In a way it was a good position to be in. I thought, 'What have I got to lose? I haven't got much working life left. I just want to do something I was determined I'd do.' So I went in with a lot more confidence than I otherwise would have done to this ADC.

In fact, I got through and was recommended for promotion. They didn't tell the examiners who I was, or anything about me, which was rather puzzling for them when it came to the face-to-face interviews and they talked about the skills I'd acquired. 'You acquired this skill because you were teaching three hundred students in a monastery in Burma?' They couldn't understand at all. It was only at the end of it that they finally understood where I'd come from, that I wasn't an internal candidate. I was in effect an external candidate, so my examples were not Foreign Office examples. I did in fact use some examples from Cuba and Brussels, but mainly they were from civilian life, non-FCO life. Luckily, I did get through the ADC and I was told I would be promoted to Second Secretary and they would look out for a Grade 7 job for me in the Office and let me know. They rang me up and said, 'We have a job for you as soon as your security clearance is through.'

I then had this six-month hiatus when I had to get my security clearance updated, which was very difficult. One of the problems was our period in Burma. I couldn't give them any reference for my time in Burma other than my husband and people in his team at the Embassy, which they couldn't accept. Luckily, the fall-back position was the British Council representative in Burma, who was wonderful. He was very keen for me to get through security clearance and knew me well enough to vouch for me. That was the one thing that got me through that very difficult situation of what do you do when you've been living overseas and in a country which was not a friendly country and who do you call on to give you a reference. They couldn't talk to the local police to check that I didn't have a record in Burma. The only thing they could do was to ask the Embassy which was Robert, basically. I

wondered whether I would get security clearance, and I was saying all the time, ‘For goodness’ sake, I’m married to a member of the service. It’s completely ridiculous.’ I finally got through that and they rang me up in December to say, ‘We’ve got a job for you in Nigeria Department as the Deputy Desk Officer for Nigeria.’ It was a job that nobody else wanted. It had been turned down by numerous people because it was a stressful job.

### **Deputy Desk Officer for Nigeria and Benin, FCO, 2000-03**

I started just before Christmas, working in the Foreign Office, and that was a steep learning curve. Everything was done online, and I was miles behind when it came to doing a brief. I had to try to put together briefs from other departments that I gathered together, but I didn’t have the IT skills to copy and paste them onto the brief. It was a real baptism of fire, I have to say. My boss was away when I started and I had nobody to turn to. It was Christmas leave and while everybody else was off for Christmas I was unable to open the filing cabinet because I didn’t know what the combination was. It was a while before I got my feet under the table.

That was a really good job because there was so much to do, masses of briefing. Nigeria particularly involved co-operation with the police, the Metropolitan Police, on cases like the Adam torso case, which was absolutely fascinating. This case involved the torso of a young boy, nick named Adam by the police, which had been found floating in the Thames wearing only a red pair of shorts. I learned a lot about what the Met did. The forensic work was absolutely superb, in fact ground breaking. The way they managed to trace Adam’s birthplace to a forty-five mile tract of land in Nigeria, which basically had the right soil composition that was found in the bones of this torso. Also the fact that it was the Yoruba ritual of the concrete pellets in the stomach of this child that made them realise that he was a Yoruba child and therefore from Nigeria, Benin, or Cameroon, possibly. The bones indicated that his mother’s milk had had the characteristics of water from Precambrian mountains that enabled them to narrow down the search to this very small corridor. They never found the people responsible. I know they put up Missing Child posters in all local villages. But some of the villages had sold their children into slavery, or sent them via traffickers who would say, ‘We’ll get a good education for your child. We’ll take him to the UK.’ These were child-traffickers, but the impoverished parents had probably thought they were doing the best for their child, so they weren’t going to own up that they had given their child to a trafficker for economic reasons because they couldn’t afford to keep him, or because they thought it

would be a better future for their child and nobody wanted to admit they'd done that. Everyone was fearful that it was their child who was the one who had been found and used in these ritual practices. It was a difficult situation for the Police and nobody answered the pamphlets they handed out. The Nigerian Police were meant to track the woman who was involved, who had been partly responsible for Adam and bringing him back to Scotland. I think they tracked her for a bit but they then lost her. It was her husband who was a known trafficker. Nobody was ever charged.

It was interesting coming back as an older person. The person doing the Cameroon desk was sitting opposite me; he was a new entrant, a similar age to my daughter Francesca, also an Oxford graduate. He must have thought it very weird to have this mum sitting there opposite him. He was very good and he later became my boss when I was in South Asia Department, years later. He was Deputy Head of Department and chose me to come back to the particular job I was doing, which was nice. I think in the end I was accepted by my colleagues though it was very challenging for them, I don't doubt. I was very lucky in that the chief Desk Officer for Nigeria, my immediate boss, was a person called Bidy Brett-Rooks, Bedelia Brett-Rooks, a very interesting personality and one of the older generation of women who knew that they couldn't ever get married or have children if they wanted to have a career in the Foreign Office (the marriage bar was only lifted in 1973). She was very occupied with looking after elderly parents in this latter part of her career, so she was very understanding to me when I had problems with the children when the boys were on school holidays. I still had concerns about balancing the demands of a full-time job and those of child-care, this time not small children, but older children who were too old to have an au pair but still needed supervision when not at school. Neither set of grandparents was in a position of being able to help. Bidy taught me a lot and I was very grateful for her patience, particularly with my poor IT skills. I seem to remember that the rest of the department were all men, so it was good to have a like-minded ally.

*Today is Tuesday 14 December 2021. This is the second interview with Pamela Gordon for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, Catherine Manning recording.*

CM: Pam, last time we finished our recording when you had succeeded in returning to the FCO after twenty-three years of absence, working elsewhere, on postings with your husband. After your initial position as Desk Officer for Nigeria, in 2003 your husband, Robert, was

appointed as Ambassador to Vietnam and you once again left your job in the Foreign Office and went to Hanoi with him. Would you like to take it from there?

### **Special Unpaid Leave, Vietnam, 2003-07**

PG: I have to say I didn't exactly jump at the chance to go to Hanoi, interesting though it sounded. I went back to Personnel Department and once again asked if there was a job for a second secretary in Hanoi, pointing out that I was fully established back in the FCO, no longer on SUPL (Special Unpaid Leave) and due for a posting overseas. The answer was no, only in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) and it was not going to be vacant for another two years. My husband's posting was three years, and there was not much point in going to Ho Chi Minh City just before he was due to leave Hanoi. As Ambassador in Hanoi, he was responsible for the consulate in HCMC, so although not immediately my line manager, I would have been working for him, a point not lost on the FCO and probably why they were less than enthusiastic about my applying for the position ... HCMC is anyway about 2 hours flight from Hanoi. We would have been living apart again, and there really didn't seem much point. Once again, I was offered Special Unpaid Leave, but this time the FCO had moved on a bit since my last SUPL in the late 70s/early 80s. There now seemed to be no five-year time limit on it. Progress to some degree at least. We arrived in Hanoi and the first thing I did was set about finding myself a job, as usual. The children were all at school or university and didn't come with us to Vietnam, though they did come for gap years at various points. I spent quite a long time initially trying to get to know people within the diplomatic community to find out what sort of jobs were a possibility. Very luckily, I met the EU Ambassador, Marcus Cornaro, and he was very supportive. His wife, Astrid, had had similar problems trying to find work every time she went to a new post. He said they had a vacancy in the EU Delegation, whilst they were waiting for a permanent EU employee to come from Brussels. It was a second secretary job, and he suggested I interview for it on a temporary basis. I did and they decided to take me on. For nearly a year I worked in the EU Delegation to Vietnam as Second Secretary Political, probably one of my favourite jobs, because I very much enjoyed working with other EU diplomats and being able to use my French and Spanish occasionally. I learned right at the beginning that nationality is irrelevant if you are an EU diplomat. When I said to my colleague at the tea-urn, 'Where are you from?' he said, 'I'm European.' He wouldn't give me any clue about what part of Europe he came from, but I discovered later he was Spanish. I was very happy with that approach. The job was very interesting; at the time it largely involved reporting to Brussels about the spread of avian flu,

which was starting to reach epidemic levels. It involved us not eating eggs or chicken for several years, which was quite a hassle when it came to baking cakes, needed for my other hat, that of the Ambassador's spouse. I was surprised to discover that you can use powdered egg in recipes. It could sometimes be a challenge keeping both hats on when I had an important EU meeting but at home the cook was wanting advice on a dinner party she was preparing for that evening!

CM: How did working in the EU Delegation compare with your experience of working in a British Embassy?

PG: It was largely similar. I slotted in seamlessly, doing the same sort of political reporting I had been doing in Havana or on the Nigeria desk in the FCO, so that wasn't a problem. You just had to learn there were different formats for things; apart from that it was more or less identical. It was really good experience. Had they offered the job to me on a permanent basis, I would have jumped at it but, unfortunately, they already had an EU diplomat lined up and he came out after nine months. After that, I had to decide what to do. Luckily, at that stage, I was almost shooed into a job which suddenly appeared in Eurocham, the European Chamber of Commerce in Hanoi. Its head wanted to take maternity leave and then decided to resign, so the job vacancy was coming up. I applied for it and luckily got it. It had to be an EU national working with Vietnamese teams, a particularly interesting combination. Unfortunately, after I'd accepted the job, Carla, the Italian previous incumbent, decided she didn't want to leave after all; she wanted just to job-share. It worked very well to start with, but in the end, Carla decided that she had had enough. I carried on by myself and gained an interesting insight into Vietnamese work mentality and working habits, especially the hierarchy of relationships within the office, because the team was very varied. My secretary, who was really the lynchpin of the whole operation, Linh, a wonderful woman, was at daggers drawn with the man who was the treasurer who she reckoned was on the fiddle (he probably was – corruption was rife in Vietnam at the time - but he was careful to avoid being found out). It raised a lot of problems. The bizarre thing about the job was that I was not reporting to other officials, as I was used to doing, but to a disparate Board of Directors, European businessmen largely based in Ho Chi Minh City. There was a particularly difficult French Chairman of the Board who would tell me I was doing everything wrong. At the same time, other members of the Board would tell me, 'That's really good.' It was very confusing, particularly with a mix of different nationalities, whose business interests did not necessarily coincide within the relatively new concept of 'European Union business

interests'. The affable and supportive Spanish director was a world apart from the aloof, somewhat patrician French Chairman, who was clearly an 'enarque'. It was not an easy chain of command. I would go down quite often to Ho Chi Minh City, to compare notes with my opposite number in the European Chamber of Commerce there who was very supportive. It was quite different sort of job for me because it was on the economic/trade side, which gave me an extra skill in my FCO CV. But after eighteen months a job came up in the embassy, which I thought could put me back on the path to return to the FCO. It was a temporary, locally-engaged job as Migration Officer, to cover the gap until a permanent Home Office migration officer was appointed from London. It was a good fit with my skills but a sensitive position because my boss was the young political first secretary and his boss was my husband! We were working on opposite sides of the secure door separating the confidential and unclassified parts of the embassy. I suspect it was more of a problem for my reporting officer – a challenge for his budding managerial skills - than it was for us for either Robert or myself. The job was a good way for me to get back into the FCO system (particularly on the IT side which was changing the whole time). It was a useful stopgap while I was honing new skills.

I worked on a Home Office scheme to repatriate Vietnamese children who had been trafficked to the UK to tend suburban cannabis "factories". Quite often there was no room for the children to sleep except for in a cupboard. Horrendous circumstances. Others, slightly older girls, were working in nail bars. They would receive no pay as they had to pay back their passage to the traffickers. There were some terrible stories from vulnerable children who had been exploited by their traffickers. I was often in Ho Chi Minh City which was a central point for trafficking. There were various organizations there who tried to help trafficked children who had managed to escape. They helped me find out more about the circumstances, particularly of young girls who'd been trafficked to China to start with, where they had been used as sex slaves or forced to marry Chinese men, there being a shortage of young women at the time due to China's one child policy. Some of these women had been rescued or made their way back into Vietnam, only to find that their families were too poor to sustain them. Another lot of traffickers would come to the village, and they would offer to take the daughter to the UK, knowing daughters were more disposable to those with large families. They promised she would get a good education, would be well looked after, and would be the responsibility of the UK's social security system. These families agreed, often reluctantly, but they were in desperate straits, such was the poverty in tiny villages all around

Ho Chi Minh City and the Mekong Delta. These girls would have a horrendous journey, finally ending up in the UK in a nail bar somewhere while boys were sent to cannabis factories. No education was offered. It was a dramatic situation that many of them faced. What we were looking in the UK was a possibility of repatriating those who wanted to go back but somehow ensuring that they wouldn't be re-trafficked. The key issue was how do you equip them with skills needed for a sustainable way of living so that they were no longer dependent on their families and vulnerable to being re-trafficked. There was a brilliant local NGO in Ho Chi Minh City, that took in these trafficked children; with separate homes for boys, and girls. They gave them safe board and lodging and reunited them with their families but persuaded the families to let them stay in Ho Chi Minh City and go through various educational courses or be enrolled in a local school that understood the situation so that they would come out of this experience with an education or with a qualification. Many of the older girls were being taught how to sew, and other skills so they could then get a job which would enable them to support themselves and often their families too back in these villages. There was an existing organization in Hanoi which could have been adapted to do a similar thing. I wrote quite a long paper on how this scheme would work if we allowed these children to come back, in fact paid for them to come back. But I was opposed bitterly by Save the Children, whom I obviously included in my research. They absolutely would not countenance the thought that these children would be sent back to Vietnam. They claimed that whatever scheme we cooked up would not sufficiently watertight to prevent the children from being re-trafficked. At that point, I finished my six-month temporary post and a permanent person came over from the Home Office to take it up. Obviously, the scheme never did get anywhere, because I never heard of these trafficked children being returned to Vietnam successfully.

### **UK Delegation to the Council of Europe, 2007-10**

I had applied to the Foreign Office for a posting, because I didn't want to get out of my career completely by being too long abroad. Robert had been given an extra year on his Vietnam posting, so it was going to be four years away from the Office and I really felt that I needed to get back. I applied for various positions with a human rights focus. One was in Geneva, which I didn't get, but then unexpectedly I got one in Strasbourg, in the UK Delegation to the Council of Europe. I had thought it mainly involved human rights work, which is the cornerstone of the Council of Europe. When I got there, it turned out to be not quite what I thought. That aside, I had to get a certain level of French and pass the exam. I'd passed one

in France when I was in Paris, but you had to have a more contemporary one. I took myself off to the French Institute for six months in Hanoi and studied every day and finally took the Council of Europe framework of language exams and got the level I needed in order to take up this post. By then I was hoping to postpone my arrival to accompany Robert until nearer the end of his posting, but my predecessor didn't want to stay on any longer so I had to go at the end of August. It was a good six months before the end of Robert's posting when I left him for Strasbourg. It was quite a big step, because I was alone, going to a new post and finding what it was like being an older single diplomat going to a post where there was nobody to help you unpack etc. It was a very different situation to going to a post as a young single diplomat as I had done on my first posting to Havana. We had to divide our things up and I took some stuff with me to Strasbourg, and managed, with the help of the Delegation, to find a flat to live in which had three bedrooms, which was enough for when the children came out in the holidays. I went off to start this job almost immediately and discovered that I didn't have any time to unpack cases. All this was a nightmare. I had various run-ins with my boss at the time. It was difficult for her, I accept that. She had never been on an overseas posting; she was the age of my elder daughter; she suddenly had this woman working for her as second secretary who was twice her age, but also quite knowledgeable in the ways of the Foreign Office, which she wasn't. It was a difficult combination really and it was not easy to persuade her that I needed time off to unpack. The flat was unfurnished, apart from one or two gigantic old pieces of furniture. Beds, wardrobes and drawers and everything like that had to be got from IKEA. I went with the Admin person in the Delegation to choose various things from IKEA to furnish the flat, only to find that they were dumped in my flat in cardboard boxes and I was told to assemble them. I said, 'When, exactly?' Because in fact I was already struggling. I had quite a lot of work; I was tending to work Saturdays in the office to catch up because it was a new job; there were a lot of demands. When was I going to do this construction of furniture? I didn't even know where to start. Anyway, I finally persuaded my boss to allow somebody from the Embassy admin team to come and construct it. This meant that I had a wardrobe and when my children came out for the school and university holidays a month later, they had beds to sleep in. Then I could settle in, but it took several months. I arrived in September and by December all the furniture had been constructed and I was beginning to feel at home. The beds had been constructed just in time for the arrival of Robert and our children for Christmas.

The whole job was quite a challenge. It wouldn't have been, had I had an accompanying spouse, so I was now seeing it the other way round. I couldn't help but think that the last time that I went abroad and did a job as a diplomat, I was single and it makes a lot of difference. Young and single, that's the key thing. Older and single (and junior) was not so easy. It was a fascinating job. I felt that I was accepted immediately on an equal level by my opposite numbers, unlike my immediate boss, in forty-six other embassies. The job itself - what I thought I was going to be mostly to do with human rights in fact turned out to be largely focused on the budget of the Council of Europe. Finance was not my strong point, so I had a steep learning curve to work out our contributions to the Council of Europe, and how to avoid any increase in them, in line with UK Government policy. That involved a lot of arguing in the Budget Committee with the Council of Europe Secretariat and a lot of negotiation with France, Germany, Switzerland and Russia – the five so-called 'grands payeurs' who collectively paid over fifty per cent of the budget. We spent a long time huddled in our group, working out our strategy for the next budget meeting and how to stop the Council of Europe overspending. Obviously, it was London that wanted to keep the spending of the Council of Europe to the minimum possible level and not agree to some of Russia's expansionist ideas which were generally cultural. The Russians would like to see a new art gallery somewhere in their sphere of influence devoted to some fairly recherché aspect of art; or a youth project, which would mean that there was less money for the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and other core human rights issues which, for obvious reasons, the Russians were not so keen on. This was both a fascinating as well as tense atmosphere to work in. The Council of Europe was founded by Winston Churchill, among others, after the war; it predates the EU. The philosophy when setting it up was in Winston's words 'jaw-jaw, not war-war'. And jaw-jaw was what we did. It was a conversation which was quite often heated, but we quite often achieved things as a compromise. We were there when the Russians invaded Georgia and you can imagine that involved a lot of jaw-jaw, not really getting anywhere in the end.

I also dealt with constitutional issues which fitted very well with my background in law, as well as democracy issues and those were the ones I really loved. But not the European Court of Human Rights at all, because my boss, who was a lawyer, was responsible for everything in the European Court of Human Rights. It was a fascinating post and I very much enjoyed working with so many different nationalities. I had good social life as I was going to a lot of their official events. At the weekends I would be free, with no husband around, so I would be

doing things with the other singles such as the Bosnian Representative or maybe the Slovakian Representative or Norwegian. I would go quite a lot to concerts, so it was like being twenty again, back in Cuba, very different, but very enjoyable. This went on for a year and a half, but there was a lot of pressure. You were negotiating and briefs were often arriving late from London. The brief had to be spoken exactly as it was written. It was all carefully drafted and we were making quite important decisions and, ultimately, I paid the price.

In 2009 I had a stroke which put me out of action for six weeks, because I wasn't allowed to have more time off than that, or if I did, I had to accept that I could no longer work at the same capacity and therefore would have to go back to London. When I spoke to the Welfare Officer in London about this, I said, 'What sort of job were you proposing for me in London?' He said, 'I don't know how incapacitated you are now, but you can always make tea.' That was a red rag to a bull, as far as I was concerned. I thought, I'm damn well not going to be sent back to London to make tea. I just got six weeks off and then I had to be back at my desk, pulling my weight. I couldn't write when I first had the stroke; my pen just fell down the page. It was a stroke on the lefthand side; there were two blood clots that had damaged the brain, so the right-hand side was not functioning properly and I still have problems with my right hand. But it also affected my language learning side of the brain which was disaster because French was the other working language of the CoE. Before, I spoke French I wouldn't say fluently but I didn't think about it. I now found myself having to hesitate over forming sentences which was very unlike what I was used to doing. My Spanish was unaffected for some unknown reason, though I had learned it relatively recently in comparison with French, which I had done all the way through school. The Spanish stayed and when the Spanish delegation came to visit me in hospital, I suddenly found I could speak Spanish without problems, which was wonderful. I couldn't speak a word of Vietnamese, which was the last language I had learned; my Polish came back in dribs and drabs over the years, but only bits and pieces, never at the level it was before, which was never particularly fluent but was GCSE level. Then my Burmese seemed to have gone out of the window, but when I went back to Burma, I found it coming back. I was reasonably competent in Burmese by the end; it came back, but never at the same level. I don't know if you ever completely recover and my French I still feel is nowhere near as good as my husband's or as good as it was originally. It took quite a long time to recover. I went to various specialists, like speech therapy, because my facial muscles were not working properly. But after a week or two the

speech therapist chucked me out, because she said, ‘You think you’ve got problems. You’ve hardly any problems at all. It’s a waste of time your being here.’ I then just got on with it, doing a lot of talking and playing my clarinet, partly because it seemed to help the facial muscles. I got back on the bicycle within two weeks, which I was very hesitant about, but Robert had come over to be with me and he persuaded me back on a bicycle. In Strasbourg it is relatively safe for cycling and that helped my balance quite a lot. It was a tall ask to be back at my desk within six weeks, but I was, so I didn’t have to return to the UK, as was threatened.

Everybody was very kind and if I was performing under par, it wasn’t obvious. I stayed on another year and I could have stayed longer. I did three years in total. I was going to stay on for a fourth year, because we were going to have the Chairmanship of the Council of Europe and our Ambassador was quite keen to keep the team in place that was already there. We had this long discussion and she pointed out to me, I think quite rightly, that if I had been under pressure enough to have a stroke before then, the Chairmanship of the Council of Europe would be very exhausting for me. I think she was right and at that point I left to go back to the UK, which was a pity because it would have been interesting being in the Council of Europe when you were the Chair of it, a lot of responsibility.

### **Desk Officer for Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, 2011-12**

The next stage of returning to the UK was not as easy as I thought it would be. FCO policy then was that you had to apply for jobs and I did fly back for one interview but the rest were all done on the telephone. There wasn’t Zoom in those days. I found it quite a different interview process over the phone and I didn’t feel I did myself justice, but at least they couldn’t see my age! Well, they knew it anyway. I found when I went back for a particular job which I really thought would be a very good fit for me – I think it was second Secretary Gibraltar desk in the European Department - they wanted somebody with government experience, who spoke Spanish and who had legal experience. I thought there can’t be that many people around with those three, but I didn’t get it. There were a couple of skills I was missing; I think that was the reason given. Then I realized that it was not going to be so easy. I really felt instinctively that my age was beginning to tell against me and other women of my generation found that too. It could have been my imagination, but I felt there was a certain amount of ageism in the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office was getting increasingly younger, and I shouldn’t have been surprised at 58 applying for a second secretary job. They

probably thought, ‘What on earth has this woman been doing?’ When the FCO abolished the retirement age, it seemed to be a positive thing, but obviously it worked negatively if you were at the older end of the age scale because you simply didn’t get the job if in competition with someone of equal ability but younger! After various other failed job applications attempts, finally, I succeeded in getting the Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives desk, which I thought was potentially quite interesting, though I didn’t know any of the countries concerned, apart from Sri Lanka. I discovered when I got there that nobody else wanted the job. It had been advertised three times and nobody had volunteered for it. It was so tough because all the countries potentially had problems including the possibility of a coup in all of them. There were some tricky political situations in all of them, and they were also prone to natural disasters. In two cases, that of Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, there was a large diaspora in London wanting to lobby ministers at any opportunity and totally split down the political lines of Bangladesh or Sri Lanka. There was a huge problem of Tamil refugees in the north of the island and a very active Tamil community in the UK.

Bangladesh was more interesting because there were two women in charge at the time, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, who were fiercely at loggerheads. Both would come to the Foreign Office wanting to talk to a minister and you were the one who ended up having to field them or help the minister with much detailed briefing. There were also many human rights problems at the time and various legal actions that involved us in a lot of extra work. All in all, it was an interesting if exhausting desk, with ministers visiting quite often and a lot of ministerial briefs to prepare. Robert had by then retired from the FCO and had become my ‘trailing spouse’. He was very busy with various non-executive positions and working on the house that we had bought while we were overseas in Vietnam plus being back-up for the children at university. I was staying up in London during the week, renting the flat of a friend of ours and at the weekends I was going to Salisbury. I didn’t particularly enjoy the desk job, I have to say. So when the possibility of the Chair of the Diplomatic Families’ Association came up – I had missed the initial advertisement, but it was pointed out to me – I applied for it, rather late, with the agreement of my boss. We’d just had a crisis in the Maldives, and they needed somebody on the desk who was very IT literate, able to fill in consular sheets on the computer in the crisis unit. I was very slow at that sort of thing, because I wasn’t so good on IT skills, whereas a twenty-year-old would have done them just like that. She and I both agreed that if I should have a shot at the job, would be a promotion as well, at a grade higher than I was at that moment. It was a good fit with my skills and

experience both as a spouse and as an officer, which enabled me to see both sides of issues. Also, I had a lot of contacts in the Office who were in places like Human Resources Department (HRD), which proved quite useful.

### **Chair of the Diplomatic Families' and Spouses' Association, 2012-17**

The Diplomatic Service Families' Association had started off as the Diplomatic Service Wives' Association because there had been a problem with supporting spouses overseas. All the Office's resources based in Personnel Department were devoted to the officer and they quite often neglected the spouse who was travelling with them, who had given up quite a lot and was struggling to keep the family going or children back in England and unable to get a job themselves. In a particular case, there was a suicide, a very sad case of a spouse who was living in a high rise building in New York and that really triggered action from the doctor in the Foreign Office at the time who had long been very concerned about the psychological problems of diplomatic spouses. Together with Lady Garner who was a retired diplomatic wife who had also been concerned about the problems of Diplomatic spouses – mainly wives at that point, they founded the embryonic Diplomatic Wives organization, which went by a different title at the beginning, the DWA, the Diplomatic Wives' Association. Then it became the Diplomatic Spouses' Association, which took into account that there were occasionally male spouses, and then we moved on to the DSFA, the Diplomatic Service Families' Association. I had worked for it several times as a volunteer -in the early days there were few paid positions. When back in England, I had done a few voluntary jobs with the DSFA: Education and Employment brief holders, so I had experience of the organization, which was very useful when it came to applying to this particular job. By the time I got there as the DSFA Chair, it had morphed into a much bigger organization. There were thirteen part-time advisers who were already specialists in their fields or had become so over the years of working with the DSFA. Everyone was working very independently and what was really needed was a team effort to make sure that everybody's objectives interconnected with the objectives of others within the team, so that we were all working towards a series of defined objectives to support spouses overseas and their families, in line with the FCO's own objectives. The DSFA had also become a company limited by guarantee, which meant we had to have a separate insurance to cover our advisers. It wasn't a charity, but nor was it a profit-making company either. It had been completely separated from the Foreign Office, but it had a large grant from the latter and a certain amount of membership fee income as well. But it mainly depended on the Foreign Office grant, which it was part of my remit to

renegotiate each year. For that reason, I was reporting to the Permanent Under-Secretary (PUS), so that he knew what progress we'd made on our yearly objectives. That was very useful link to have, especially when the PUS was supportive, and certainly at least one was. My new policy of aligning the DSFA appraisal system based on objectives, with the FCO was not a popular move as it led to considerably more work. But it did give us more clout when it came to negotiating on behalf of our members. It also ensured that DSFA employees were able to apply for incremental benefits and bonuses benefits in line with the rest of the FCO since with our appraisals and objectives aligned with the FCO's there could be a direct comparison, which could be reviewed, if necessary, by the FCO's HR department. This was an important step towards recruiting the best qualified staff as the salaries were competitive enough to attract good applicants. I also had to spend some time ensuring that DSFA employees now had a proper personal pension scheme, which had become compulsory for small companies. I think we had got better at solving problems in the DSFA over the years and we had done a lot of lobbying the FCO to improve conditions for spouses and families. The Foreign Office had already been persuaded to sponsor a limited fund for re-training spouses in more portable careers. We successfully lobbied the Administration for the fund to be expanded. The DSFA was now able to pay for retraining as TEFL teachers and a wide variety of other 'mobile careers' as well as upskilling spouses who wanted to train through online courses when overseas e.g., project management courses, open university etc. If you made a good case for something that would improve your career prospects when you were travelling overseas, you would be able to claim a certain amount of individual funding. Our careers adviser was excellent, and she helped spouses both by running career courses and by giving individual career advice on courses and other options. There was a lot of support out there, which would have been wonderful, had we had it in my days as accompanying spouse. In fact, my specific problem of trying to keep a diplomatic career going as a career officer married to another one, now didn't exist to the same extent. The Foreign Office had completely changed their view and it was no longer impossible to have a joint posting. And there was also the possibility of separate joint postings in countries that were near enough to commute. Things are now looking a lot more positive.

A main theme in my exchanges with the FCO Administration was the importance of the welfare of the families. Over the preceding years, the FCO had been pared to the bone by the Treasury and had to constantly find ways of saving more money each financial year. As a result, living condition overseas were constantly under pressure. The Treasury as home-

based civil servants were not sympathetic to their overseas-based counterparts in the FCO and I suspect thought of us as ‘fat cats’. Indeed, in some very difficult countries we did have good accommodation and allowances, but they were directly related to the standard expected of home civil servants. As the latter started increasingly being posted to embassies overseas, there was more understanding that living in a tiny flat in a dangerous area in Africa/Asia was a very different ball game to living in a leafy London suburb or further afield where dustbins were usually regularly emptied, traffic was kept moving and weather conditions were largely temperate. The welfare of Diplomatic Service (DS) officers themselves were the responsibility of HR Department. But not so their spouses and families, who were largely uncatered for except for a very hard-working small family section of HRD who handled family issues in close consultation with the DSFA. The DSFA could see that it was not easy to run the Foreign Office overseas operation with all their dependents too. But perhaps not worse than running Shell, the oil company, which was also trying to post a number of families overseas. We often conferred with Shell and other large multinational companies who had similar problems. But they tended to have a lot more money behind them to support their family associations. Their circumstances overseas had become increasingly better than the Foreign Office’s, as our budget became ever smaller. We also compared notes with Army Families’ Federation (AFFA) because they too had similar problems, but rather less overseas, more because they were being transferred around the UK and constantly having to change schools or houses. In my time they were also better off than us as the services’ budgets had increased as the FCO’s diminished.

We also belonged to an organization called EUFASA (European Union Families and Spouses Association) which I was very keen to push, so we always attended every year during my period of office. EUFASA was excellent. All the European Union Families’ Associations (including some non-EU ones such as the Swiss) got together to compare what they had achieved during the year, what advances they’d made in the support of families and we’d all make use of these ideas when in negotiation with our respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Smaller, newer EU members countries would often quote the DSFA’s achievements when approaching their MFA for more funds to support their Association. But to be honest, we had had an early start with many years of hardworking DSFA predecessors behind us. Every year we met in one European capital to have these meetings and then they were followed up properly. We all presented papers; the DSFA nearly always presented one on any advances we had made recently in important fields such as family welfare or working

spouses. The Americans came as observers but they had fewer problems as were already very well supported. I had visited American Embassies overseas when I was doing welfare visits overseas and they seemed to have a lot of support as had the French and Germans. The Swedes had already negotiated a proper salary for their spouses. It was the new countries of the EU which had less of a professional set up behind them and were looking for advice and ideas on how to set one up to support their families.

CM: Was there one thing that you felt was a particular achievement while you were Chair of the DSFA?

PG: I felt that we had acquired more leverage in the Foreign Office because we aligned ourselves more closely with FCO objectives and kept the senior administration well informed of what we were doing. I knew quite a lot of the senior administration well from my own FCO career and that of my husband over the previous nearly 40 years. So I felt more able to go to them directly with problems. From that point of view I think I helped the DSFA to feel better represented at the top of the Office. I was especially concerned about the welfare of our families overseas around that time because of the cost-cutting measures that the FCO had been obliged to introduce to meet the Treasury's target for ministries to cut their budgets each year. A lot of the money the FCO was saving seemed to be at the expense of living standards overseas. Accommodation deteriorated as rent allowances were lowered and the DSFA received a number of alarming letters from our members about housing conditions in the country they were posted in. These ranged from families in China who were being housed in small flats in large high-rise buildings jammed next to other high-rises so that they had little daylight. There was nowhere for their small children to play due to absence of gardens or parks in the area, pavements were overcrowded and difficult to manage with a pushchair and so on. Eventually these problems would be eased by families being moved further out of the centre. Other reports from India were even more alarming and in the end I initiated a system of welfare visits to families in posts/regions of concern.

One particular visit to India to visit the apartment a junior official and her family had been put in, shocked me so much that I took photos and listened to video recordings she had made and reported straight back to senior management at Post, as well as HR in London and the PUS. The issue revolved around housing the young family of a single parent in a cheap flat on the edge of a slum clearance zone. The children were terrified by the owner's vicious guard dog that was chained up outside the owner's flat on the floor below, which they had to

walk past to get the school bus every day. The officer's bedroom faced directly onto the edge of the slum. Immediately in front of it was the house of an exorcist who plied his profession every night resulting in bloodcurdling screams from the person being exorcised. It was impossible for the officer concerned to sleep properly. They were being disciplined for failing to turn up to work on time and finish their work quotas and were on the verge of losing their job. The embassy couple who had lived in the flat before had asked to be moved because of it and had fortunately recorded the entire proceedings one evening. They were finally moved out, but the post's administration had promptly moved the new arrival, a single parent with two children, into the same flat. The newly local administration officer had refused to listen to any complaints on the grounds the officers were lucky to have 'accommodation' as many didn't in her country. Attempts to get senior management involved had not been successful and I was the last resort. I was able to convince the head of post that the situation was serious and followed it up with the Family Welfare Officer in London and eventually the PUS. The officer concerned was eventually moved to other accommodation and as far as I know their career saved.

I hope as well that I made the FCO a bit more cautious about the way they were going about swingeing cuts to accommodation overseas and failing to monitor them adequately. In this particular case there had also been many obvious management-chain errors. What compounded the problem was that the employee was from another government department and this was their first (and only) overseas posting - the contrast with their quiet house near Croydon was simply a step too far and they felt out of their depth with no one to turn to for help when their pleas to the embassy administration were ignored. They were not the first to suffer from cuts to living standards nor would they be the last but their case was a particularly striking one.

On my welfare visits to our members overseas, I came across other hardships caused by housing problems. Often it was the outsourcing of services that was at the root of the problem and the localization of the administration in the embassy in countries where the 'norm' was very different to the cultural standards families were used to in the UK. Riyadh was another post where conditions were hard for our female spouses because of the Saudi ban on women driving. I spent two very full days listening to a stream of complaints from female spouses about restrictions on daily life that resulted from being without transport. And without the means to pay for a private driver. Everything from shopping to the children not being able to stay for after school activities because the school bus could only do one run at

the end of school day. By working with the deputy head of mission and the CLO (Community Liaison Officer) we were able to achieve a bit more flexibility in the use of embassy cars and a designated driver for spouses to be able to use as well as better hours for the embassy shopping bus. They were minor victories, but did I think improve the daily life of our female spouses and their families and was helpful for the single female officers there.

One joint achievement with the Head of HR was to persuade the Foreign Office to introduce voluntary unaccompanied postings overseas where the spouse and the children remained behind in the UK to continue their work/schooling. Either the officer could commute daily, if the country concerned was within commuting distance, or the officer could have a single person's accommodation plus extra leave for commuting weekly. There were obvious advantages for the FCO who were finding it increasingly difficult to persuade officers to take postings overseas, even to hitherto popular places like Paris. It was also a cost-saving exercise as they wouldn't have to pay for family accommodation overseas; boarding school fees would be less as would children's concessionary journeys. On the face of it, I could see there were advantages for our members too. Our spouses were increasingly reluctant to give up their own careers to accompany the officer overseas on each posting; many families wanted their children to remain at their local schools and didn't want them to go to boarding schools; accommodation standards overseas had been so reduced by cost cutting that they were often not up to the standard of the UK family home leading to particularly difficult living conditions in certain developing countries. Despite these obvious benefits for our members, I was in two minds about this initiative, which I felt we had not been properly consulted about. Being of naturally sceptical mind-set, I saw it as a possible two-edged sword at the time, but I was persuaded by HR that the DSFA should back it as a joint initiative. It probably has helped quite a lot of people, but I could see that there were difficult decisions ahead for some couples. It is not always so easy to commute at the weekends, especially from America. There was provision for some fares to be used in reverse to allow spouse and children to visit the officer in post but nowhere for them to stay unless they were prepared to pay for the extra expense of hotel accommodation. We were concerned that it could ultimately lead to more marital separations as couples saw each other less and less. Potentially in the FCO, it could lead to a more divisive environment of 'inner' and 'outer' postings where some people managed to stay on the inner circuit of commutable postings and others began to resent what seemed to be an inferior outer circuit which meant more difficult countries and less possibility to commute. Plus of course the old problem of single officers

coming off worse, since they would invariably be sent to the more difficult countries or find themselves covering weekend duties in nearer posts where many offices commuted home and were not available to be on call. However, this is probably my natural Yorkshire pessimism and I'm sure in time with careful planning these pitfalls can be minimised.

From a very personal point of view and despite being annoyed at losing my own career, I feel sad to think that families will find it hard to choose the lifestyle that we, their predecessors, had. Despite our complaints, I think that ultimately many of us feel we benefitted from the FCO posting regime. I certainly felt that my husband and I worked as a partnership overseas and faced challenges together. We were privileged to have got to know well so many different cultures and countries and to have made such good friends overseas. I think our four children are generally grateful that, thanks to the many posts they went to with us, they've had a wide exposure to different culture, languages and ways of life that have very much influenced their choice of jobs and lifestyles now. Even if boarding school was the downside at the time for several of them. For our generation, diplomatic life involved the whole family, which was very much a life-style choice. There were disadvantages but they were more than made up for by the opportunities offered to live and travel in different cultures and experience different ways of life, admittedly we were usually doing it from a protected embassy environment in most cases. But recent cuts to living standards overseas have made that sort of life more difficult for the new generation. Families will be able to pick posts that will enable them to stay in the UK throughout the officer's DS career. Fewer will choose the excitement of a challenging, distant post and instead opt for short holidays abroad. The Diplomatic Service will change, that is inevitable, because the younger generation will demand change. But I hope this records the sort of life our generation experienced.

Biographical Note: I joined the FCO in 1973 straight from university and retired in 2017 at the age of 65, having spent 23 years as an accompanying spouse and 14 years as a DS officer.  
Pamela Gordon (née Taylor)