

MY EXPERIENCE AS A FOREIGN SERVICE SPOUSE

BY LIZA LINKLATER



Photo by Jeannie Brown

I was asked to write a short piece under an extremely tight deadline on being a spouse in the Foreign Service. That's a big request, and one that takes considerable reflection. I think any spouse would have different feelings about being in this position depending on any number of circumstances. One could write volumes on this topic—and many have done so.

As I sit here on a rainy monsoon day in Manila, I ask myself—would I do it all over again? The answer is yes. There have been many more positives than negatives. But that's not to say that the negatives should be overlooked. Moves anywhere are challenging. Much depends on your own attitude.

I feel fortunate to have been able to live abroad. I have accompanied my husband, James Trottier, on two separate postings to Bangkok (my favourite), as well as to New York City, and now we are in Manila. We had travelled around the world together prior to joining the Foreign Service, so both of us love travelling and adventure. I had applied to the Foreign Service as well, and was interviewed, but apparently was not whatever they were looking for in that particular year.

James has now been with the Foreign Service for 26 years, spending half of the time in Canada and half abroad. I remember joining the Working Spouses Committee as soon as we arrived in Ottawa. The same issues regarding work and pensions are being discussed today and will continue to be long into the future. Joining the Foreign Service can be a difficult decision, since typically both partners in a relationship want to have fulfilling careers.

Because I have a portable vocation as a writer and photographer, I have often enjoyed the time abroad more than living in Ottawa. I have been fortunate that I have been able to pursue my career whether at home or abroad. As a freelancer, I can work as much, or as little, as I want—and my earnings reflect this. My income goes up and down like a yo-yo in both places, but abroad I have more precious time to pursue my interests. This is often not possible when working full-time in Ottawa.

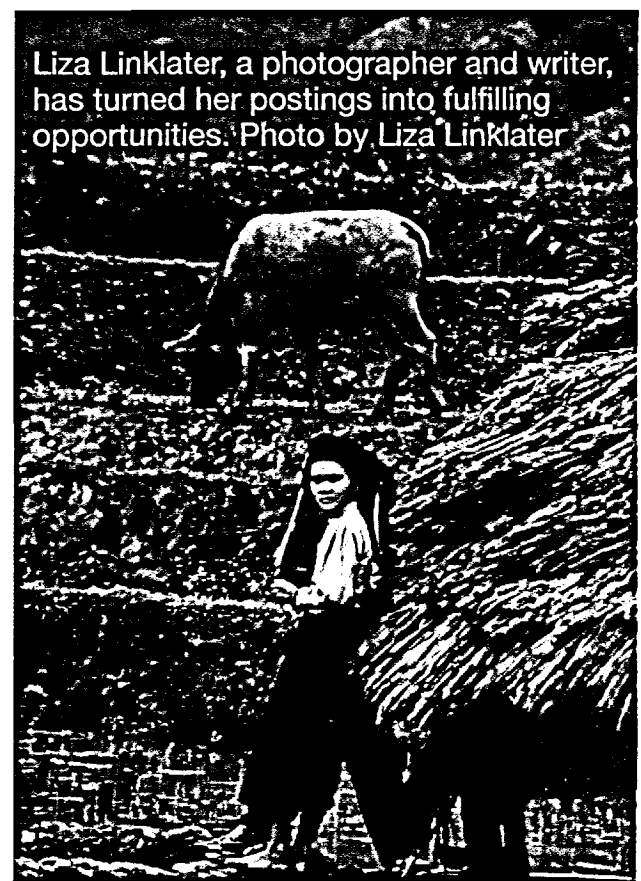
I do not feel that I “followed” my man—in fact, I hate that expression. We have always decided together where we would try to go on posting and we have accompanied

each other. I have always done “my own thing” while abroad and have taken part in diplomatic functions only when I wanted to.

The comings and goings are challenging. Abroad, we make new friends only to have them leave, or we depart ourselves, a year or two later. It is always difficult to leave friends and loved ones behind, but with the incredible advances in technology it is so much easier to keep in touch than BPC (Before Personal Computers).

I have enjoyed the unique experiences I have been able to have abroad—all the people I have met, places I have seen, things I have learned—and I look forward to all the new journeys yet to come.

Liza's work can be viewed at www.lizalinklater.com.



Liza Linklater, a photographer and writer, has turned her postings into fulfilling opportunities. Photo by Liza Linklater