

## □ INTERVIEW □

ferent, and this is something which I think has changed for the better. I have three daughters and I would not want them to have to give up their careers.

**Liaison:** *Many spouses are concerned about the affect repeated moves and the demands of the service will have upon their own careers. Would you have any advice or suggestions for a young couple starting out on a foreign service career?*

**Mary Taylor:** I sympathize with people's frustrations at being cut off from their career and their future opportunities. I think it is something a couple should discuss very seriously when one of them goes into the foreign service because in many cases foreign service life will undeniably have an adverse affect on the spouse's career.

The first thing I would do as a young wife is to go over it with my spouse and see whether this was really what we wanted to do, and whether conceivably my career was more important than his and required his not being in the foreign service. I think that there might be some instances where one person has to give way and I think it shouldn't always be the woman, it should sometimes be the man.

There is no easy way around this, although it does depend on what one's career is, and it can be helped to some extent by having arrangements with other countries so that people can work. Many spouses have taken courses in teaching English as a second language, and that is an area in which there is a good deal of work abroad. There are some careers that are obviously more portable than others, for instance, certain kinds of journalism, translation or computer-related jobs. If possible, it is a good idea to explore which practical skills are worth learning before going on a posting.

The best suggestion I can make to those embarking on postings, is to

There are a lot of opportunities in the developing world besides paying work. If one is academically inclined, there are a host of subjects yet unstudied. Women I know have written and published books on subjects unexplored in the western world. Others have started import/export businesses that market materials from other countries.

prepare yourself as best you can. Learning the language softens the culture shock upon arrival, and it puts both you and your family in a more receptive frame of mind.

Foreign service families sometimes forget that there are a lot of other careers that involve moving, so it is not a problem exclusive to the FSO. Foreign service families have become accustomed to a high success rate in their careers, so officers and their spouses sometimes build-up unrealistic expectations for their futures forgetting that the majority of people don't have meteoric careers. This may be partly due to the mystique of getting into the foreign service.

**Liaison:** *What aspects of foreign service life do you feel have been of major benefit to yourself, or perhaps to your family?*

**Mary Taylor:** One benefit of foreign service life is that you tend to try to get the most out of wherever you are. A lot of people feel when they are posted somewhere for three years that they

may never go there again, so, during that time they try to get the most they possibly can from the experience. In foreign service life you see a lot more and do a lot more. I believe life in the hard posts — D posts — can be every bit as rewarding as an A posting, particularly because of the kind of support you get from the Department and the foreign service community. We found Moscow a very satisfactory place to live, for example. The community was like a family, making extra efforts to involve children and families. The problem with living in a big city like Paris, can be the lack of contacts and interaction. From my experience it is not always easier to be happy in an A post than a D post.

One major benefit for the children — apart from getting a much broader view of the world — is that they all speak French well, and three speak it at a very high level because they have been educated almost entirely in French. We also benefited as parents of children who were in the host country's schools. Schools are geared to producing citizens of that country and teach the children values deemed appropriate to their culture, and so this provides wonderful insights into a country that one would never otherwise have had. Our family is fortunate to have profited so much during our postings. We tend to be less involved in physical activity and more interested in the arts and this has influenced our children as well. One daughter writes an art column and her interest is probably attributable to her international experience.

I have greatly enjoyed getting to know other countries and their cultures. I find that as a result of living abroad I have developed interests that give me a lot of pleasure, and that I wouldn't have necessarily been exposed to under other circumstances. Of course, this varies from person to person. In my case, I have learned a bit about art and antiques and I have really enjoyed that □