



From the Foreign Service Community Association

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Recently I was contacted by a spouse very new to the foreign service who expressed her exasperation at lack of information on the foreign service life and how its realities will affect her. After some discussion, she asked me if I would answer a very personal question. The question: "Have you enjoyed it?" My answer: "Oh yes; definitely yes!"

The reason for her question was that no one would really talk to her about why they remained attached to the foreign service. While I feel that foreign service life can be improved (perfection has yet to be achieved), here and now I'd like to try to articulate a few very personal reasons why this peripatetic existence has been worthwhile for me and my family. Some of the pleasures we've found in the foreign service are really quite unexpected. I, who grew up in the same house and neighbourhood that nurtured my mother through her childhood, would seem to be the least likely person to thrive on having to disconnect and re-establish myself every few years. I have learned that my security derives from my family and deep friendships in fresh communities and societies. My children have discovered that their family is a source of pleasure and security; communication

and fun can be found within the family. Interdependence through the difficult periods gives us the freedom to share each others' pleasures the rest of the time. Life in the foreign service is not easy or uncomplicated. There has been pain and stress attached to our mobility, particularly as our children become older. But even the teenager who changed schools four times in five years and lost a year in the process agrees that he wouldn't want to live any other way. Even for him, the enrichment outweighs the pain.

Another point rarely discussed is that each member of the foreign service has a particular status when abroad, and is able to meet a wide variety of local people. What an opportunity! What a joy! Along with this goes the reality of being representative of and identified with Canada. One of our sons, at about age six, wailed that he just wanted "to look like everyone else and not *always* be different!"

We are all more sensitive to international issues and the needs of other cultures; our world is made up not so much of black and white but varying shades of grey. This does not preclude our having strong opinions, but perhaps we choose more carefully where we

express them. In our family it is often with each other, and the phrase "home truths time" at the dinner table is the signal for an unexpurgated discussion of what is really bugging us about life in whatever different and exotic environment we find ourselves.

The pains and pleasures of mobility are most apparent around our repeated relocations, tearing up those roots that we all established with such difficulty, packing up the treasures that surround us to disappear into storage, and sending off irreplaceable bits of our lives in hope that they will arrive undamaged shortly after we do. All the rules within the family have to change when we relocate physically. The difference between one post and another requires us to re-define responsibilities for each member of the family. It's an opportunity for real growth and communication. Because this process happens so regularly, it is difficult for negative patterns to drift on until they become destructive.

The actual move really hurts, and the adaptation period is really tough every time, but the pleasure and excitement that result have made it worthwhile, at least for this family. The foreign service departments, the future for the foreign service life has definite attractions for us.

Because it was pointed out to us that there is a need for new members of the foreign service to discuss this life as it is actually led, the Foreign Service Community Association is arranging small group meetings between those newly associated and veterans of postings. We anticipate that this will be an on-going series of meetings as new people enter the foreign service. Let us know if you are interested so we may set up such a group for you and other newcomers. We're here to help. Call 993-5729

Nancy Fraser

FOREIGN SERVICE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION 125 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership Application • Fee: \$12.00 per year
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Memberships are due in January of each year.		Tel.: (613) 993-5729