

THE POWER OF POSITIVE PERSISTENCE

THE GENERALIST MAJORITY

Most foreign service spouses are generalists. While freed from the constraints that hamper the specialist in finding employment, it does make it difficult to persuade others that one can actually do the job.

The creative job search in action is exemplified by **Caryl McKay**, teacher, journalist, salesperson, public relations officer, office automation expert and, now, burgeoning computer software specialist.

She would have no trouble answering the question, "What can one do with a B.A. in English Lit.?"

While raising her children, she sold Avon products and worked as a teacher in Milan and at the International School in Hong Kong. After taking journalism by correspondence, she found a research and editing job with *The China Letter*. Tiring of this she parlayed her administrative experience as a volunteer into a public relations job with a bank.

Following her husband to Milan and Hong Kong, Caryl was away from Canada for eight years and felt "like Mork from Ork when I got back". Out of step but not out of the job market.

She looked around for what was available, honed her experience résumé and found a position as manager of office services for a computer software firm. She is intimidated by an impending posting, she is accepting a new position within the company and continues to wonder, "Now what can I do that is new and exciting?"

Her advice? "Do something. Success leads to success. The strength and adaptability of the women who junket around the world with their families is fantastic. Deciding to work for nothing takes courage, but it is better than doing nothing and you can never tell when it will lead to something else."

MAKING YOUR OWN OPTIONS

Job opportunities for foreign women in Jeddah are few and far between. Leisure time is plentiful. And so is boredom. **Fran Roberts** resolved that situation for herself by combining local need with her particular skills and founded a school for the mentally handicapped.

Local facilities for teaching the mentally handicapped were for Saudi children only. Expatriates had to send their children away for schooling. Many of the children in her small school had never been to school before and so it was a new experience for both child and parent.



Papier mâché sculpture by Barbara Barker

The idea began when Fran heard of a child with Down's syndrome for whom there was no opportunity for education. Word of mouth spread the message and soon other children from England, India, Lebanon, Costa Rica, America joined the little group.

Never more than five at a time, the children ranged in age from three to 13 and were accommodated in a room of Fran's house.

"The key to success at an isolated post is to keep busy. Besides, it is a great way to get to know people more than superficially. These parents had no local options so there was a real need. I had the training to meet that need, so I had to use it somehow."

There are not many business owners among the foreign service spouses. However, it can be done. **Jacqueline Lessard Bilodeau**, founder, director and owner of L'École de Musique Lessard says that the seven years of hard work have been worth it.

Recipient of the Concours et Prix de Conservatoire d'Athènes, Jacqueline could have been a concert pianist. However, two paripatetic careers in one family would have been too much.

A regular teaching career was not possible because of repeated postings, so she borrowed the necessary, rented a studio, bought instruments and began her own music school.

Eight students grew to 80 with six instructors. Large enough to carry on but small enough to be managed long distance from Paris. Admittedly, things do not work as well

when she is away; however, there is always work when she comes home.

Until now Jacqueline has kept the administration in her own hands. She returns to Hull twice a year for registration, to set the calendar and maintain the illusion of her constant presence.

Expansion means that an on-the-spot administrator will be needed. Teachers, students and parents will become more of a business and less of a family; however, successful enterprises cannot stand still.

Are the risk and hard work worth it? "Yes."

THE LAST WORD

All of these people prove that you can have your cake and eat it, too.

For them, the thought of spending the next 25 years in Ottawa is less appealing than the thought of moving to Ouagadougou. However, they admit that you need an insatiable curiosity and a desire to learn because experience may be the only payment you get.

They agree that if making money is the only reason you want to work, you had better stay at home.

Moving around has meant a different career than they would have had at home. They have done things they would never have had a chance to do otherwise. Perhaps they have made less money but they don't regret a moment of it.

After all, they point out, how do you know what you would have done if you hadn't been a foreign service spouse?